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FLOSSIE WAS SWUNG ROUND AND FLUNG ON THE SOFA, CHOKING AND ALMOST STUNNED.

POOR LITTLE COLUMBINE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

It was a wild night in the middle of January; the rain poured in torrents, and the wind blew as though the storm fiends had been let loose. Very few pedestrians were in the streets, and fewer still along the fashionable suburban roads west of Knightsbridge.

In a very select and quiet thoroughfare stood one particular house in an enclosure of leafless shrubs and tall, gaunt trees, whose bare branches beat incessantly against the front windows. Tonight they are lashed into tempestuous fury by the blast.

It is a small house, but brighter and more imposing than its fellows, being newly painted in very lively colours.

No one could guess the means or position in life of the owner of that pretty bijou house by its outward appearance.

There were four windows on the first floor, each draped on one side with sweeping curtains of rich lace, while on the other were heavy curtains of ruby damask; and those being drawn across the windows, the lights from within, shining through them, shed a wine-red glow on the outward desolation of the winter night.

Within all was radiance, comfort, and luxury. In one of the rooms, curtained with wine-red damask, two men are seated. Both are young, both handsome; one exceedingly so; and both have that *distingué* air affected by the well-bred youth of the period.

The plainer of the two, Mortimer Lytton, is the owner of the pretty bijou house in the Belgravian suburb.

He is a man of taste and refinement, and by lately succeeding to his father's property he has become one of the richest iron-masters in the

Midlands. He has a big warehouse in the City, where among his workpeople he is a thorough man of business. Outside his counting-house the simplest detail connected with trade is never discussed by him; outside his warehouse he is an art worshipper, one who never lets the chance go by of securing the most trifling gem in painting or statuary. His house in Pelgrave-road is filled with all that is most beautiful in art.

Mortimer Lytton is a bachelor, and is very firm in his resolution to keep so, and (much to the annoyance of mammas with marriageable daughters) is very boastful of his freedom from marital ties.

Mortimer Lytton's companion is an old college friend, who has been his guest during the past fortnight, having come by invitation to enjoy "a merry Christmas."

Dormer Townley is a gentleman by birth, breeding, and education. Unlike his friend, he has lately married an heiress, and thus trebled his own large fortune.

This marriage was not a happy one. Dormer

Townley married the lady to please the friends on both sides, though he did not care a pin for her; but the lady married him because she loved him, and thus gratified both herself and friends.

Dormer Townley was a handsome, elegant, indolent man of fashion, who fancied he loved art as much as his friend Lytton.

On this wild January night he reclined in elegant languor amid a pile of red and white drapery on a couch, with the lights from the lamps shining through their coloured shades on his handsome face and bright auburn curls.

"Now, Dormer, old fellow, you haven't opened those letters yet, and I am dying to know how Mrs. Townley is," says Mortimer Lytton, as he threw the end of his cigarette in the sea-coal fire, and drained the glass of Burgundy that stood beside him.

"Don't be a bore, dear boy. I was busy thinking, and had quite forgotten the letters," answered the guest, in his slowest pronunciation; then raising himself slowly on his elbow, he reached forth his soft white hand, and took up a letter in his dainty, gem-set fingers.

Leaning back upon the cushions, he read the superscription, "D. Townley, Esq." In the thin, spidery hand he knew so well; then, with a disdainful curl of the lip under his amber-coloured moustache, he tore open the envelope, and drew forth two separate notes. Glancing at them in his gay, careless way, he started suddenly, all his languor vanishing. Raising himself quickly to a sitting posture, he opened his large violet eyes to their widest extent, and turned them with a strange look of appeal to the face of his host.

"By Jove, Mortimer, look at this!"

"Who is it from, old boy?" inquired the host, leading forward to inspect the handwriting.

"Why, a letter from Marion, enclosing that infernal note you sent me a day or two before I came here."

"You don't meant that? By Jove!"

"The one containing all that nonsense about poor little Olymp at the Frivolity."

"How in the world did your wife become possessed of it? What a fool Mrs. Townley must think me! You are so careless, Dormer, you must have left it about where the lady could find it."

"What's to be done? Marion will be sure to see it in a serious light. Then add to all the delightful hours I pass with my beautiful Flossie; and in this classic paradise of yours, dear Dormer, where art, literature, and friendship all—"

"And love!" interrupted Lytton, laughing gaily.

"And love," repeated Dormer Townley, warmly, as he sipped his wine.

"Allow me to look at the wretched scrawl. I actually forgot it," said Mortimer, holding out his hand.

Dormer Townley threw the note to his friend, who glanced over it with a contemptuous curl of his lip and handed it back.

"Marion is silly enough to believe it. She'll kick up no end of a row," Dormer said, as he tried to scowl at his friend through the clouds of cigarette smoke.

Having failed in this he commenced reading Mortimer Lytton's invitation aloud,—

"DEAR OLD TOWNLEY,—

"I wish you could run down here for a day or two—that is, if Mrs. Townley can spare you. After the dissipations of Paris the quiet of my suburban retreat will be very soothing to you. I do not invite the lady, as my bijou house is too small. Mine is a bachelor home, I have no accommodation for ladies. I would like you to see it. The walls are covered with gems of art, pictures and statues, crayons, bronzes, and *écrins à bascule*. I know of old that you have a weakness for pretty women, especially actresses. You should see the columbine at the Frivolity, the loveliest little thing that ever passed before the footlights. I visited all the leading London theatres last week, but there is nothing like her on any other stage. You must try to win over

Mrs. T. to let you come, and you can judge for yourself. Barn this.—Yours, &c.,

"M. L."

"What am I to do!" exclaimed Dormer, suddenly.

"Why, write a conciliatory note to Mrs. Townley, or, better still, start for Forndale tomorrow by the earliest train. Wire to-night to announce your coming. This prompt compliance with your wife's wishes may set matters right. I am not tired of your company, dear boy, nor do I wish to drive you away; but consider the short time you have been married, and what the lady's feelings must be, and what she must think of me for keeping you here!"

"Ugh!" ejaculated Mortimer Lytton's guest, in a tone of disgust, as he slowly raised himself from the couch and began pacing the room to and fro in an excited way. "Mortimer, I envy you—on my soul I do! I envy you your liberty and the charming, unfettered life you lead."

"Good Heavens, Townley, you are little more than three months married! Do you so soon regret it?"

"Hm! Give me a glass of curaçao, old boy, and let us enjoy ourselves while we may. I am going to the Frivolity to-night if I never go again. What do you say, Mortimer, will you go?"

"What would you say if Mrs. Townley were to surprise you one of these nights as you sit quietly worshipping at the shrine of sweet Flossie Lorrimer?"

"After to-night, Lytton, I must be on my guard; but I must go to-night, come what may. If Marion ever hears of it there will be a row. It will be too awfully awful, you know."

"Listen to the wind and rain! Are you going in weather like this? Hark! Those leafless branches will break the windows to pieces. Stay where you are, Townley."

"I cannot. Besides, the brougham will be at the door in a moment or two."

CHAPTER II.

With the collars of their overcoats turned up carefully over their ears, Mortimer Lytton and Dormer Townley sat shivering in the brougham, while being whirled through the pouring rain to the Frivolity, where Mortimer Lytton had engaged a box for the season. The two young men took their places shortly after the ringing of the curtain.

The pantomime was a great success, and the house was crowded.

Mr. Dormer Townley, though handsome and brilliant as usual, looked "out of sorts," his friend thought. He was restless, and did not watch the performance with his usual attention.

He did not stay long in the box. He stood up, and, turning to Mortimer, said,—

"I am going to the saloon. Will you come?"

"Not yet. I am too much interested just now. I shall follow presently."

Mr. Townley went out, and his friend turned his eyes to the stage; but though apparently watching the performance, an observer could see that he was staring at vacancy and thinking deeply.

"Fool that I was to invite him here without his wife! Knowing him as I do, why did I permit him to stay so long? I fear there is mischief brewing for us all. He has married that hapless young heiress for her money alone, condemning her to the worst fate that can befall a woman, that of an unloved wife."

A slight noise interrupted his musings, he turned and saw a little white hand holding back the crimson curtain, and a fresh young face, lovely as a dream, with a bloom like the wild rose, looking in at the opening and smiling upon him, with lips bright as ripe English cherries—a face lit up by soft golden-tinted brown eyes and framed in glittering golden-brown curls.

Mortimer Lytton, in spite of his vexation, smiled at sight of this fair vision.

"Alone, Mr. Lytton?" asked a sweet voice.

"At present, Miss Flossie. Come in."

The young girl let the curtain drop behind her and glided into a seat, where his broad shoulders screened her from the house.

"Where is he?" she whispered, softly.

"At the saloon, I daresay."

"Oh!"

"He is in a bad humour to-night, Flossie. He had a letter from his wife that vexed him. Of course you know he is married!" Mortimer Lytton says with cruel bluntness, knowing how passionately the girl loves his friend.

She shrank back, so that the light from the gaselier did not fall on her face.

"Yes," she answered, in a low voice.

"Floss, I'm afraid those gold-brown eyes of yours have done my old friend much mischief," Mortimer said, after a prolonged pause.

"I hope not. Why do you think so, Mr. Lytton?"

He could detect the tremor in her voice, but her face being in shadow, he could not see the shifting colour in her cheeks, or the despairing light in her eyes.

"You have bewitched my poor friend, Flossie."

"Bewitched Mr. Townley!" she says in a low voice.

"Come out here in the light, Miss Lorrimer, and let me look in your face. I know it is blushing like a peony."

"Don't, Mr. Lytton! Mr. Townley is nothing to me, and I am not blushing."

The girl's grieved, tremulous tone moved him.

"Flossie, I am sorry for your own sake that you ever met Dormer Townley. I wish you might never meet him again. I wish this, Floss, because I esteem you both."

"I will never see him again after to-night," she answered. "I heard yesterday that he was married, but I was not sure. I intended to question him to-night; it is unnecessary now. Ah, here he comes!"

"Flossie, my queen, how lovely you look to-night! Why so late, pet?"

The girl looked at him with an expression of mingled pity and contempt. His fair face was flushed, his voice unsteady and thick, and he almost fell in his attempt to embrace her.

"It is time to dress, so I must go, Mr. Townley," she said, in a tone of hauteur, as she eluded his grasp, and escaped from the box.

For some time silence was observed by the two men, who sat intently watching the transformation scene, with its brilliant colouring and the varied and charming pose of its living statuettes.

Both men were reluctant to break the silence. Flossie's coolness had been so marked that Dormer Townley was at a loss to know the cause of the change. He had never during their short acquaintance hinted at his marriage.

Had Mortimer Lytton told her?

The transformation scene is complete, every fairy is in her place, and the limelights play on a glorious scene, while the house rings with the plaudits of a crowded and enthusiastic audience. The harlequinade begins as the clown makes his *début* in hot pursuit of the "old 'un," and receives some artistic taps from the magic wand of that slippery and untiring spirit of mischief, the harlequin.

In the confusion that followed, occasioned by a *mélée* between the clown, pantaloons, harlequin and policeman, a fairy form glides gracefully before the audience on the toes of her white satin boots, the lovely young columbine, all gauzy and golden. She made her way through the crowd, sitting about like a fay—a lovely vision, with that fair flower-face, those lovely gold-brown eyes, those shining teeth and rosy lips, and that glittering cloud of gold-brown hair.

Dormer Townley started from his semi-sleepy state at sight of Miss Olymp, as she was named in the bills.

"Oh! Mortimer, is she not beautiful?" exclaimed the snaroured young man, as he followed the artistic evolutions of the fair Columbine.

Lytton did not reply, he felt too vexed to do



sog; but when the curtain went down on the last scene, seeing his friend still linger, he touched him on the arm.

"Townley, come away! The house is nearly empty. Come!"

"She will come up here, you know; she always does. I must wait, for I must see her to-night. Don't be ill-natured, old fellow. But I'll come; we may meet her on our way out. Let us go to the saloon."

He stood up, Mortimer following his example, and walked very uneasily from the box. They made their way downstairs, and lingered in the vestibule.

The rain still poured in torrents, and the discomfort was great.

Conveyances were hard to be got; but Mortimer Lytton's brougham waited to take that gentleman and his friend to Palgrave-road.

Dormer Townley would linger in the vestibule in the hope of seeing Olymp, and his friend chafed at the delay, the night was so very cold.

The two men lit their cigars, and kept moving about to keep themselves warm.

"I see her, Mortimer—I see Miss Lorimer!" suddenly whispered Dormer to his companion, and the next moment he was pushing through the crowd to where a brown sealskin hat was visible under a gas-jet.

Her fair face flushed, and her eyes shone like dark stars at sight of him.

"Mr. Townley!"

"Flossie!"

"You have startled me," she said, with a coldness of manner quite unusual to her.

"I am going to see you home, Miss Lorimer."

Just then the brougham drew up to the kerb, and Mortimer Lytton made a sign to Dormer, and on the latter approaching Mortimer said—

"We must take Miss Lorimer home. There is nobody here to meet her, and she won't be able to get a cab to-night."

"Ay, we'll take you home, Floss. Let me band you in—"

"How kind of you, Mr. Lytton, to take me home! Mamma thought I could get a cab, and to do not come this dreadful night to meet me."

She addressed herself to Mortimer, and seemed to ignore the presence of Dormer, who had been drinking too deeply to notice her coolness. But he took her arm and led her across the wet, shining pavement, Mortimer holding his umbrella over her. Dormer seated himself beside her, Mortimer taking the opposite seat.

The next moment the carriage was flashing along the silent, shabby streets. The ride was a long one, and the trio sat in silence nearly all the way.

Mr. Dormer Townley was intoxicated, and Flossie was disgusted, and did not speak to him.

Mortimer tried to engage her in conversation, but she replied in monosyllables, and relapsed into silence again.

CHAPTER III.

For the dreary ride came to an end, and the brougham drew up before a small detached villa in the Larkfield Road.

Dormer Townley alighted, and, finding the gate open, signalled up the garden path to the front door and rang the bell.

Mortimer assisted Flossie from the carriage. As he did so he could see that she looked really ill. All the colour had faded from her cheeks and all the brightness from her eyes.

"Good night, Mr. Lytton, and thank you very much."

For a moment the old smile lit up the sweet face as she held out her hand to him.

"Good night, Miss Olymp! You don't look yourself to-night."

"It is the cold, Mr. Lytton; it affects me very much," and she shivered as she stood inside the gate.

"Don't let us keep you out here. There, the door is open. Run, Miss Lorimer."

"Good night, Flossie, my dear," says Dormer, in an uneasy voice, holding out his hand to her, but the girl ran past him without answering him or touching his hand, and the sour-looking female who was shading a lighted candle in the porch hurried in and slammed the door as soon as the girl had crossed the threshold.

Driving homeward Mortimer sat opposite instead of beside his friend.

"Dormer, I must avail myself of the privilege of an old friend to warn you in time."

"Against what?"

"Flirting with that young girl. You, a newly-married man! It will cause a scandal!"

"By Jove, a scandal!—what have I done?"

"You have been filling that child's head with idle fancies, and sowing the seeds of discord between yourself and your wife."

"By Jove, here's a charge! Why, my dear friend, Miss Flossie's golden head was full of idle fancies long before I first beheld or fell in love with her sweet flower-face and soft brown eyes. And the seeds of discord were sprouting up between Mrs. Townley and I before we were married a month."

"Good Heavens! Townley, you don't mean that. I know you to be thoughtless, careless, anything that is not right-down dishonourable—but to marry this lady, this daughter of a millionaire, Jones Yolland's heiress, without loving her is something too—"

"I married Marion Yolland to please her friends and mine; I never once made love to her in all my life. Poor Marion, I am sorry for her!"

"Pity is skin to love, they say. I hope pity will warn into love in your case."

Dormer shrugged his shoulders, and turned away with a gesture of disdain.

Mortimer Lytton, warming with the subject, caught his friend by the sleeve, and twisted him round.

"Townley, be a man! Be true to the woman you married! Subdue this base passion for a girl with a fair face and beautiful eyes! Flossie Lorimer is a good, as well as a pretty, girl. She has a widowed mother dependent upon her; then why—"

"By Jove, Mortimer, this is too bad!"

"No, no! I mean it for your good, old fellow. Don't be angry. Go back to Ferndale. Your doing so will disabuse your wife's mind of those ideas she has got hold of, and in a few weeks' time, when the pantomime is over, and poor Olymp is far away, come back to London, and we will resume our old pursuits and visit our old haunts together. Do you hear, old boy?"

"You're a good fellow, Mortimer, but I cannot—I cannot give up Flossie Lorimer; and I cannot—Ugh! I don't say any more. Mortimer, I think you are tired of me. I'll soon shift my traps to the Grosvenor Hotel; but don't annoy me."

"Well, my advice don't seem to be appreciated, so you can do as you like."

"That's right, old fellow. I know I'm a bad lot, but I can't help it."

"Ah, well, here we are at home, thank goodness! What a night it is, to be sure!" observes Lytton.

"By Jove, don't it rain!" responds his friend.

"I hope Mike and Mrs. West are awake! I forgot my latch-key," mused Mortimer, as he tried to peer through the rain-beaten glass.

"Why, there's a hansom at the door! Who can it be at such an hour?"

As the brougham drove up to the door the empty cab was driven away. The two men got out, and went up the steps.

The rain still poured in torrents. The hall light burned above the door, and the gauntlet, shining through the crimson curtains of the first-floor window, shed a warm glow on the wretchedness without.

Mortimer Lytton pulled the bell briskly, while Dormer Townley kept close behind him, the collar of his overcoat turned up, and his teeth chattering within the folds of his white muffler.

The chain was partly withdrawn, and the door opened a few inches.

"Who's there?" asked a gruff voice, with an unmistakable Irish accent.

"Open the door, Mike; it is I."

"Och! is it yer 'oner? Shure I didn't know yer voice wid the noise of the wind and rain. Come in out o' the wet. O, mother o' Mose, what a night!"

"Shut the door and put up the chain."

While Mike was fastening the door the master of the house and his guest had divested themselves of their overcoats, hats, and mufflers, and were ascending the stairs, when Mike's voice arrested Dormer Townley, who was going up behind his host.—

"One word wid ye, Mr. Townley, av ye plaise."

"Yes, Mike. What is the matter?"

He stood on the third stair from the bottom, looking very handsome and debonair in his stylish evening dress.

"I only wanted to say to ye, Mister Townley, that the lady that kem in the cab wants to see me! What lady do you mean?" interrupted Dormer.

"Sorr bit o' me knows, but she knows you well enough, sir."

"A lady i a lady!" he repeated, as he hurried up the stairs, with a strange misgiving that something unpleasant was about to happen.

Entering Mortimer Lytton's sanctum somewhat hastily, he came behind that gentleman just as he was in the act of bowing very gallantly to someone not visible from the door.

A step forward and he was beside his host, and staring full at a lady who was seated on the same couch he had himself occupied before going to the theatre that night.

No words can express the effect that lady's appearance had upon Dormer Townley.

As she sat on the couch in her costly garments she suggested the idea of a pile of asbes and sealskin, from which a small, white, pinched face looked out at the two men in the doorway. She attempted to stand up, but her sables got entangled in a mass of scarlet drapery lying on the cushions.

Having succeeded in freeing herself she stood up, holding out her hand to Mortimer.

"Mr. Lytton, I believe!" she said, very sweetly.

"At your service, madam," Mortimer answered, with a bow.

"And I am Mrs. Townley."

"I am delighted to welcome you to my bachelor retreat, madam, and I hope I see you quite well, Mrs. Townley."

Dormer Townley's wife was petite and graceful, but her small, colourless face had no claim to beauty. Her hair was scanty, and of a pale yellow. Her lips were too thin and straight, and, being constantly compressed, had a hard look, while her large, light blue eyes always seemed to have a look of appeal in them.

As Mortimer entered the room first the lady looked at him with an eager, questioning glance in her restless light eyes, and her lips parted as if about to speak, when she caught sight of Dormer.

"Good Heavens, Marion, is it you?" he exclaimed, as he stared in blank amazement at her.

"Oh, Dormer!" she cried, in a tone of appeal, and she moved as if about to spring forward and embrace him.

For one moment an expression of unutterable love lit up the pale face and eyes, making them almost beautiful. She tried to press forward to him; in doing so her eyes met his. Their expression made her recoil in terror. Those same blue eyes were fixed upon her face with a look of diabolical hate, and she shrank back, covering her face with her hands.

"Marion, I shall never forgive you this night's work," he said, bitterly; and scowling darkly on his shrinking wife, he turned upon his heel and left the room.

Mrs. Townley stretched her arms towards him with a gesture of entreaty, but he took no notice of her. As he disappeared through the door her arms dropped by her side, and she sank back

upon the couch, overcome with shame and humiliation.

Mortimer Lytton was at her side in an instant, and raising her to a half-sitting posture among the cushions, rang the bell.

The Irish man-servant put his head in at the door.

"Send Mrs. West here at once, Mike," says his master.

"Yes, sir. Is the young lady ill, master? She looks bad, poor thing."

"The lady has fainted, Mike. Don't you see? Go, tell Mrs. West to come."

"Yes, sir."

"I have not fainted, Mr. Lytton, but I am stunned with horror at my husband's treatment and reception. Oh, Heaven! how shall I get back to the hotel!"

"Not to-night! You cannot. It is just on the stroke of one o'clock. The cab that brought you from the hotel is gone away. The rain has not abated, so it is impossible for you to return to the hotel. I will leave you in the hands of my housekeeper while I seek Dormer. What does he mean by such conduct?"

"No—oh, no! I shall go back to the 'Alexandra' if I can get a conveyance. I shall not stay here with my husband; I shall not return to Fendale with him; I shall go to my father."

"There is some mistake—some misunderstanding, my dear Mrs. Townley."

"There is not, Mr. Lytton. Dormer Townley married me for my wealth, but my father was too wise to give him absolute control over my money or property. My husband cannot touch a penny or a pannaworth belonging to me without my consent. Mr. Lytton, can you send for a cab or any conveyance to take me to the 'Alexandra'?"

"Not until Dormer returns. Surely you are not going without seeing Dormer? In fact, you are not going at all, my dear Mrs. Townley. My house is very small, and the rooms being fitted with my art collection leaves me but little accommodation for visitors, especially ladies; but my housekeeper is a nice, motherly old soul, who will do her best to keep you comfortable. What's keeping that Mike?"

He rang the bell as he spoke, and the next moment Mike's white waistcoat and shirt-front appeared in the doorway.

"Oh, Heaven be good to me, Master Mortimer. Just remember now, that ye sent me for Mrs. West, but I followed Master Townley upstairs to see if he wanted anything an' forgot my errand."

"Where is Mr. Townley now?"

"In his room, an' in a terrible passion entirely."

"Go at once and tell Mrs. West to come to me here."

"No, Mr. Lytton, do not send for your housekeeper. Do not trouble; I shall do very well. I shall not stay one hour under the same roof with my husband. You have been most kind to me, Mr. Lytton, and I shall never forget you for it," said the unhappy woman, in a quivering voice.

"But, my dear madam——"

"Oh, do not attempt to stop me, Mr. Lytton! I'll go back to the hotel if I have to walk it, and to-morrow I shall join my father at Leamington."

Her face was pale, her eyes full of the deepest sorrow; her hands trembled, and the jewels on her fingers glinted with a strange lustre.

"I will ask you to add one more favour to the many for which I am already your debtor," she said, lifting her troubled eyes to his face. "Will you please send for a cab? Or if you will accompany me I shall go on foot."

She fastened the silver clasp of her sable cape as she spoke, and stood up, looking a very fragile little woman indeed as she shook out her long sealine ulster with its deep sable border. She wore a hat of dark brown sealine, trimmed with feathers of the same colour; two great diamond pendants twinkled in her large gold ear-rings. Everything on and about her was rich and costly; every detail of her toilet bespoke the wealth of the wearer.

"On foot, in weather like this, at a quarter-past one in the morning!" exclaimed her host in

the greatest astonishment, as he looked down in the small, youthful face, and the great, troubled eyes.

"Yes, Mr. Lytton, I will go. My maid is at the hotel. Do not stop me; Jeannette will sit up for me."

Mortimer took her thin, white hand in his, looking down with pitying eyes in the pale, anxious face.

"Then you are determined to go, Mrs. Townley?"

"Yes, Mr. Lytton; I'll go to papa to-morrow. He will know how to settle matters with my husband better than I."

She seemed scarcely able to control her passion, though she tried to smile as she arranged her pretty sealine hat on her coiled, fair hair.

"Then I must order the brougham to be brought round again," said Mortimer, and he was about to leave the room for that purpose when Mrs. West, the housekeeper, entered.

"Ah, Mrs. West, I don't think we shall need you now. I wanted to ask you if you could manage to accommodate this lady for the night, but she won't stay."

"It's a terrible night to turn out, mum," said the housekeeper, as she followed her master from the room.

"And now, Mrs. Townley," said Mortimer, on his return, "shall I seek Dormer and ask him what he has to say?"

"No, no, Mr. Mortimer; you've had trouble enough, and are very kind to offer to take me back to the hotel at such an hour."

The brougham was soon at the door, and Mortimer gave his arm to the lady and led her from the room.

Marion Townley was very pale and agitated, and shivered in her sealine and sables as she passed through the pouring rain to the carriage, Mike repeating, sorrowfully,—

"Oh, sich a night, for sich a delicate lady; sich a night, sich a night!" as he watched the brougham driven away through the pitchy darkness.

CHAPTER IV.

VERY few words passed between Mortimer Lytton and his fair charge during the drive from Palgrave-road to the Alexandra.

Arrived at their destination Mortimer Lytton handed the lady out, and led her up the steps and along the various corridors to her suite of apartments, where he took his leave, promising to call the next day.

Mortimer Lytton went down to his carriage and was driven home as fast as two high-stepping bays could take him. The drive through the sloppy streets was a dreary one, and the owner of the bijou house in Palgrave-road was very glad when the brougham drew up before that favoured residence and the hall door closed behind him, shutting out the rain and sleet and biting blast. He was soon seated by the sea-coal fire, smoking a cigarette and mixing a tumbler of hot negus.

When he had disposed of his wine and smoked several cigarettes he sat in his lounge-chair, musing, with his gaze fixed on the glowing fire, until Mike aroused him from his meditations, and he went to bed.

At eight o'clock next morning Mr. Mortimer Lytton sat down to breakfast alone. His guest did not usually appear at that early hour. He allowed himself an hour for breakfast and looking over the morning paper. At the end of that time he set out for his place of business in the city, where he passed the day.

He expected Dormer Townley would call in the course of the morning, but he was disappointed.

At eleven o'clock he returned to Palgrave-road to prepare for his promised visit to Mrs. Dormer Townley. Mike informed him that Mr. Dormer had left the house at ten o'clock that morning, and had not yet returned. Having made some alteration in his toilet he set out on foot for the hotel.

On reaching the Alexandra he found that Mrs. Townley's name was in the list of departures,

Exceedingly annoyed he went on to the city; but business was distasteful to him, and having arranged matters with his manager, he went home to Palgrave-road, and was admitted by Mike.

"Mr. Townley is come back, sir," said the worthy servitor.

"Indeed! Thank you, Mike."

Ascending the stairs two at a time the first objects he beheld on entering his own sanctum were Dormer Townley's patent leather boots hanging over the back of a chair, while his head and shoulders were buried in the soft cushions of the couch, with the morning paper spread over his face.

"Dormer!"

"Hello!" exclaimed his quondam guest, starting up, throwing the newspaper on one side, and looking round with sleepy eyes at his host. "Oh! is it you, Mortimer! What a confounded bore!" he grumbled, with a prolonged yawn.

"What do you mean by that? What's a bore?"

"Everything. There's my wife turned up just when I didn't want her."

"Quite right; you should behave better to her and study her more. Why don't you break off with that dancing-girl at the Frivolity, when you know that your flirtation with her will raise an impassable barrier between yourself and your wife? Have you seen Mrs. Townley?" he asks, with an angry frown at the reckless man, who apparently had been drinking deeply, as he looked quite stupid.

"Not since last night; I went to her hotel this morning, intending to give her a piece of my mind, but I was too late. She was gone."

"Mrs. Townley has gone back to her father, I dare say. She told me last night she would do so. I called this morning at the Alexandra, but she had left. I suppose she has gone to Leamington."

"By Jove! won't there be a row with old Moneybags! Marion is all right enough herself, but her father—how! He settled all her money on herself, I cannot touch a shilling; but I expected him to tip up handsomely some day. Of course it's all over now. 'All for love and the world will lost!' I would not alter it if I could. Haw!"

"I've been mistaken in you, Townley," said Mortimer Lytton, fiercely.

"You have? In what way?"

"I thought you were a gentleman!"

"Lyton!" and Townley whirled round suddenly and faced him. "By Jove, Lytton, your eyes look dangerous. Don't look at a fellow like that!"

"What will Mrs. Townley think of me?" asks Mortimer Lytton, bitterly. "She believes that I induced you to leave her alone at Ferndale all this time; and she looks upon me as a scoundrel, of course!"

"She is awfully jealous, and awfully angry. Marion is naturally jealous. I can't help it, and I can't help loving Flossie Lorriher, and I can't cast her off!" Dormer says, between the puffs of his cigarette.

"It's a bad business, and I'll never forgive myself for inviting you here!"

"Never mind, old fellow!" answered Dormer, with a light laugh.

"What are you going to do now?"

"Don't know. But this I do know, that the meddlers who insisted upon marrying us have it all to answer for!" said Dormer, as he stroked his yellow moustache. "By Jove! there will be a row with the governor! But old Moneybags can do his worst!"

"Well, you know best, old fellow. Excuse my interference. I am very sorry for Mrs. Townley; she seemed to be so angry, and so unhappy. You know you have not behaved well to her!"

"I know I've not. But what could she expect? It's the way these forced marriages always end. I always liked Marion; she was a jolly little girl. We've known each other since we were boy and girl. She was always spoons upon me, you know, but I could never picture her as my wife. When they said we ought to

get married neither of us objected. I went like a lamb to the slaughter, and here I am. Going to the *Frivolity* to-night, Lytton?"

"I cannot go with you; I have an engagement at seven. I don't know when I'll get away, but I may drop in at the theatre before the harlequinade. But if I were in your place I should follow Mrs. Townley to Leamington. You have time enough. Give some explanation, and never look upon Flossie Lorrimer's face again."

"What! never see Flossie Lorrimer's face again?"

"I say so. That doll's face has wrought all the mischief! I ordered an early dinner to-day; it will be on the table in a quarter of an hour."

"All right, old boy," answers Dormer, with his light laugh, as he followed his host from the room whistling a popular air.

The two men soon dressed and dined; and having passed an hour over their wine set out on foot to get cabs to take them to their different destinations.

CHAPTER V.

THE harlequinade had commenced when Mortimer Lytton stepped softly into his box, and sat down opposite his friend.

The house was brilliantly lighted; and Flossie Lorrimer, looking lovelier than ever in the airiest of toilettes, was performing wonderful feats of agility before a delighted audience. Her cheeks glowed with a beautiful pink bloom; her soft, brown eyes shone like dusk stars, and her full lips, red as the heart of the rose, were parted in a smile of girlish delight, showing the pearls within.

The harlequin was tall and slender, and an accomplished athlete, performing startling feats in his mystic dress of black-and-gold.

As he whirled the light form of the columbine to and fro he watched the direction of the brown eyes, and noticed that they always turned to one particular box.

He has seen the same gentleman in that particular box night after night; sometimes there were two, but not often. The one with the fair, Saxon face has not been once absent since her first appearance a couple of weeks ago.

The harlequin watched with a jealous heart the looks of worship which those handsome eyes in the box flashed back to the young columbine.

Jealousy raged within his breast, for he loved the fair girl, and thought that he might win her if this formidable rival was out of the way.

So he hated Mortimer Lytton with a fierce hatred, and wished he had never come to the theatre with his faultless toilette, his diamond rings, and his hothouse flowers.

But Flossie honoured the harlequin to-night, for she wore his flowers. The tuft of scarlet and white geranium near the left shoulder was his gift; but the *Gloire de Dijon* on her bosom was the gift of Mortimer Lytton.

As the two men in the box continued to watch the columbine's face keenly, they saw her suddenly turn pale. The harlequin followed her glance to a box to the left of the stage. In that box sat a woman—she sat back behind the curtain, and could not be seen by Mortimer Lytton—or his friend—a woman with wide, wondering blue eyes, and a white, wondering face. The light blue eyes were fastened in an unwinking stare on the young columbine, who seemed to be transfixed by them, until the harlequin, by a dexterous movement, snatched up the little figure and whirled her round, thus recalling her to herself.

She looked round with startled eyes, and noticed that the audience and the musicians observed her agitation, and she made a resolute effort to avert her eyes from that white-set face that filled her with such vague horror.

Just then the harlequin saw her glance up at Dormer Townley, and blush. He saw his rival's rose tremble on her bosom, and a pang of jealousy shot through his heart.

He was standing on one leg, with his right arm stretched out, and Flossie Lorrimer had just

vanquished lightly on his open palm, where she stood poised on one foot.

As he gently raised her about three feet from the stage that jealous pang passed once more through his heart; all power and feeling seemed to leave his arm, and it fell helpless to his side. Flossie dropped on her feet on the stage, uttering a little scream, for she was very much frightened and shaken.

Several of the audience thought a more serious accident had occurred, but the harlequin soon recovered himself, as also did Flossie, who now leaped on her partner's open palm, and, poised on the toe of one golden embroidered satin boot, was borne round and round in triumph.

CHAPTER VI.

THE pantomime is over, and the curtain has descended on columbine and harlequin, clown and pantaloons. The lights are nearly all out; the house is nearly empty, and the audience are being borne away by the carriages and cabs waiting outside.

In the vestibule a knot of persons still linger, and conspicuous among them is Dormer Townley. The lower part of his face is hidden by the fur collar of his ulster, which is turned up.

He is a great favourite with the leading actors and the regular habitués of the *Frivolity*.

He has just parted with his friend Mortimer Lytton, who has gone home in a cab, leaving the brougham at the disposal of Townley. He has been waiting for Olympph, and at last she appears, her slender, graceful figure in a long tight-fitting sealskin jacket, a black velvet hat exquisitely turned up at the sides and trimmed with black feathers and silver fox-fur. Under the pretty hat the fair girlish face looks bright as a sunbeam.

"Ah! my star of the night, how brilliant you are looking!" said Dormer Townley, as he placed one arm around the slender figure, and motioning with the other to the coachman, who was waiting at a little distance.

"Mamma has not come for me. I am so glad. It is such a dreadful cold night, and she is so delicate. I told her you would be likely to drive me home," said the girl, as she looked up and down the dingy street that in the daytime is such a fashionable promenade.

The brougham draws up to the kerb. Dormer hands the girl in, and, for the last time Olympph, the columbine of the *Frivolity*, is borne away from the scene of her triumphs. As the brougham drives away from the theatre a four-wheeled cab leaves the line of waiting vehicles and follows, keeping it well in view, but never gaining upon the former. The brougham soon leaves the livelier streets behind, and is rattling along the lonely roads of West Brompton to Larkfield-Terrace, where the pretty detached villa occupied by Mrs. Lorrimer and her daughter is situated.

It is very lonely in Larkfield-road, the lights are dim and far apart, and the villas and mansions, looking so pretty and picturesque in the summer time, look bleak and deserted this cold frosty midnight, while the trees stand out like great gaunt skeletons against the leaden sky. Down Larkfield-road the brougham rattles, followed by the four-wheeler at a cautious and safe distance.

The brougham slackens its pace, going up a slight incline in the road.

The Jehu on the four-wheeler slackens his pace also. Whether he was tired of following the brougham so long, or was obeying an order from his fare is not known, but he suddenly began lashing his horse with his whip until he goaded him into a sharp gallop, and passed the brougham at a rapid rate, leaving it far behind.

As he went by Jehu heard a peal of sweet laughter, and a man's voice singing. His fare heard it also.

On went the four-wheeler. A few minutes' hard driving brought it to an old-fashioned roadside public-house, with a horse-trough and pump in front.

The cabman drew up to let his horse drink, and his fare opened the door and got out—a female figure. But the night was too dark for the sharpest eyes to be able to define that form so closely muffled in dark wraps. This mysterious person stopped close to the cab-driver, and said a few words to him in a low whisper, then stepped on the pavement, and passed quickly up the road.

The driver turned his horse's head towards town. Again he lashed the beast into a gallop, and passed the still slowly moving brougham.

On, on, under the pale, dim stars and black, lowering sky, walked the muffled figure. She seemed to know the way well. She paused at last before a detached villa enclosed by a low wall overgrown by evergreens.

An iron gate admitted the visitor to the front garden. A gravel walk led to the door, which was sheltered by a large wooden porch that in summer time was covered with a tangie of roses, and creepers, and trailing greenery, but which now hung about in wild disorder—a mass of bare, leafless tendrils, covered with hoar frost.

On either side of the porch were seats, each capable of holding three people. It was intensely dark, as there was no lamp or other light.

For two minutes the dark figure stood still regarding this house; not a gleam of light was visible in any of the windows, not a sign of life visible in or about the place.

At last the silence was broken by the sound of wheels coming slowly up the road. The dark figure darted to the iron gate, turned the handle, softly entered, and closed the gate noiselessly, then ran nimbly along the gravel walk, and disappeared within the porch, but did not ring or knock.

The sound of approaching wheels drew nearer and nearer. At last the brougham stopped at the gate, and the watcher huddled up on the seat in the porch could hear two people get out; then the gate opened, and two people advanced slowly up the path.

"Do not come any farther, dear! Mamma may come to the door when I ring, and she will be angry with me for being so thoughtless. Say good-night here."

"Oh, Flossie—Flossie! my darling—my darling! how obdurate you are!" says Dorner Townley, in an impassioned tone.

"Ah! you are again forgetting that you are a married man," laughed the girl. "Your wife will find it out one of these days, then you'll see how unpleasant everything will be."

"Not if you will be advised, and consent to leave England with me, darling!"

"I cannot listen to this, Mr. Townley. Good-night!"

She held out her hand to him.

"Good-night, darling! Good-night, until tomorrow!"

"Enough, Mr. Townley! Good-night!"

She withdrew her hand forcibly from his grasp, and retreated a step backward. He lifted his hat with one hand as he opened the gate with the other.

She stood and watched him go out and enter the brougham, and the coachman turn the horses' heads towards London; she stood a moment listening to the receding carriage-wheels; then she turned, and entered the porch.

She was feeling in the pocket of her long sealskin jacket for her latch-key when a hand came heavily down upon her shoulder, while another hand clutched her throat, and she was swung round and flung on the seat, choking and almost stunned.

She could see the outline of a dark figure between her and the pale stars that shone in the leaden January sky.

She tried to cry out, but could not, the grip on her throat was so tight; the assault had been so sudden.

She thought of the bell, but she could not reach it.

"You are the Columbine Olympph, of the *Frivolity!*" hissed a voice in her ears.

She tried to rise, but the hand on her throat

held her back. These long fingers only tightened the more she tried to shake them off.

In her half-insensible condition she tried to realize her danger. Her assailant, she thought, was either mad or intended to murder her.

She must, then, make some effort to save her life. Summoning all the strength of her young womanhood to her aid, she made a spring, dashed her assailant on one side, relieved her throat from that iron grip, and held the dark figure at arm's length.

"Who are you who dare attack me in this cowardly manner?"

She tried to reach the bell-handle, but her adversary stood between her and the door.

"Stand aside, and let me ring that bell! How dare you? You are a woman! This is a woman's arm I hold! Get away!" and she flung the woman away from her, and again tried to ring the bell.

But her enemy was too quick for her. The thin fingers flew once more to her throat, clutching her with that deadly grip till she felt herself choking, and her eyes ready to start from their sockets.

"I am —," said the stranger, as she kissed a name in the girl's ear that made her start with terror.

Her assailant closed with her, but the girl cast her off.

"Oh, mother! Hannah! Mercy! Murder!"

The voice was low and muffled, and could scarcely be heard by anybody within.

With the last cry "Murder!" Flossie had fallen, her enemy with her, but the long fingers still retained their fatal grip on the slender white throat.

A terrible struggle for the mastery followed the fall of the two women. The girl on the mat fought and rolled, and turned and twisted. Her enemy, kneeling beside her, never relaxed her grip.

At last the fierce struggle abates, the convulsions are over; Flossie Lorrimer lies still on the mat in the porch, with that horrible figure kneeling beside her.

"Ay, die with his kisses on your lips! I am avenged!"

The figure rose from its knees and spurned the body of the murdered girl with its foot; then fled from the spot down the gravel walk to the gate just as a cab, having set down a fare at the gate drove away.

A woman enters, and the dark figure moves to one side to let her pass, but the new-comer is tall and strong, and she clutches the other by the shoulder.

"Who are you, and what do you want here?" she demanded, in an imperious tone.

No answer.

"Do you hear me? Who are you? What did you want in that house?"

"I came to see Miss Lorrimer home," came in a subdued voice.

"I don't believe you—I don't believe you! You are here for no good. My Flossie doesn't know you. Where is she? Flossie, Flossie, darling! Where is she?" continued the woman, giving her prisoner a fierce shake that caused her hat to fall off.

The night was very dark, but the new-comer could see that the intruder was a woman, with a very white face and very light hair.

"Well, I don't think you are taking anything away, so I shall let you off. But remember, I shall know you again among a thousand. Go!"

The intruder, who was replacing her hat upon her head, did not reply.

The other woman opened the gate and held it, while the dark form flitted out into the night; then, slamming the gate, she walked briskly up the path, entered the porch, and stumbled against the prostrate form of Flossie Lorrimer.

Uttering a loud cry, she laid her hand on the bell-handle and rang a violent and prolonged peal.

"Open the door, Hannah; there's been some foul play, and you have not attempted to see what's the matter."

There was the sound of slumped feet within—the removal of a chain, the withdrawal of a

bolt, and the door opened, and the poor, terrified face of an old woman appeared.

She held a lighted candle in a brass candlestick, and the flickering light fell with a sickly glare on the lifeless form on the mat.

"Why, mercy on my soul! Is she murdered, or what is the matter?"

She fell on her knees beside the body. She tore the fur away from the neck of the murdered girl, unfastened the sealskin jacket, revealing the Glorie de Dijon, crushed and faded on the unheaving bosom.

She looked upon the face where the grey shadow of death had replaced the delicate peach bloom, that looked so lovely one short hour before.

With a shriek of madness the woman sprang to her feet and ran down the garden walk shouting.—

"Murder! Police! Police! Murder! Stop her!"

Then, round the neighbourhood windows were pulled up and windows were pulled down, and light-capped heads and bedroom candlesticks were held forth in the darkness, while the quick tread of policemen might be heard rushing to the scene of the tragedy, the foremost of whom found Mrs. Lorrimer in a dead faint on the gravel walk.

CHAPTER VII.

By nine o'clock the next morning all London had heard of the horrible murder at No. 1, Larkfield Villas.

Those who had been at the theatre the night before spoke rapturously of Flossie Lorrimer's appearance on that occasion. She had never looked so lovely, she had never been in such high spirits, she had never sung so sweetly, she had never danced so gracefully. She had surpassed herself in everything.

Mortimer Lytton sat down to breakfast at eight o'clock, and was in the act of chipping an egg when somebody knocked at the door. Then the handle was turned, and Mike appeared on the threshold.

"Master, master, did ye hear of the murder?"

"What murder, Mike?" inquired Mortimer, as he went on preparing the egg, not appearing to be interested.

"Why, that party graythur at the Frivolity was murdered last night, sir."

"What?"

Mortimer Lytton was not a demonstrative man. He rose slowly from the breakfast-table, staring at his servant's face in blank horror and amazement.

"Who has been murdered?"

"Miss Olymph, the young lady in the pantomime," answered Mike.

"How do you know this?"

"The milkman and the policeman told me."

"And how did they learn it?"

"The milkman comes from the next street to Larkfield-road, and he was telling the policeman, and they were both talking about it when I was beating the mate this mornin', and they could me—"

"Good Heaven! It cannot be."

"An' they say that a swell took her home in his carriage an' murdered her at her own door," added Mike.

"What?" shouted Mortimer, turning on Mike with a face crimson with fury.

"Begone, sir," he cried stamping his foot at the man. "Begone, and attend to your own business."

"Shure I'm tellin the thruth, sir," grumbled Mike, retreating from the scene.

His master crossed the room, and slammed the door behind him.

"Good Heaven! what does he mean? Murdered! Impossible! There is some mistake!"

He opened the door, passed into the hall, seized his hat and overcoat, and, having put them on, went out banging the door behind him; then walked down the road, hailed a cab, promising

double fare to be driven to Larkfield-road in the shortest possible time.

As he drew near the house the large crowd assembled outside convinced him that there must be some truth in Mike's report. The crowd made way for him, thinking he was some friend of the dead girl's.

He rang the bell, and was admitted by old Hannah.

"Can I see Mrs. Lorrimer?" he inquired.

"Please to step this way. Who shall I say, sir?"

He took a card from his breast pocket, and pencilled underneath his name "Mr. Townley's friend," and handed it to the woman, who led him into a small apartment and left him.

After the lapse of a few minutes a tall, thin woman, with a grief-stricken face, and large, melancholy eyes, slowly entered the room.

Mortimer Lytton saluted her courteously, and took the seat she indicated. She did not sit down, but supported herself in a leaning position against the table.

Though Mr. Dormer Townley had been a constant visitor at the house in Larkfield-road, Mortimer Lytton had never been there before; and though he knew Mrs. Lorrimer by sight, he had never been introduced to her. He therefore felt rather embarrassed when the lady entered the room. But she seated him at his ease by holding out her hand, with—

"How do you do, Mr. Lytton?"

"Madam, I had the honour of knowing Miss Lorrimer. Indeed, that young lady and I were very fast friends. I have called this morning in consequence of certain rumours that have reached me, and which I trust are not true."

"And what does rumour say, Mr. Lytton?"

"That there has been a terrible crime committed last night."

"There has been a terrible crime committed last night."

"And is it possible that the victim was —?"

"My darling Flossie!" sobbed Mrs. Lorrimer, covering her poor, white face with her thin hands.

"Is it true that she was —?"

"Murdered!"

"Good Heaven! How—for Heaven's sake how!"

"Strangled."

"Strangled."

"I found her dead on the mat in the porch a quarter to one this morning."

"And suspicion points to my friend Townley!"

Mrs. Lorrimer removed her hands from her eyes, and looked straight in her visitor's face.

"Mr. Lytton, I assure you my friend is innocent of all knowledge of this crime. My darling was slain by the hand of a woman."

"Mrs. Lorrimer—"

"It is true. Dark as the night was I caught sight of her face, and I should know it again among a thousand. I expect Mr. Townley to call. He will have to attend the inquest. I believe he was the last who saw her alive."

"He was asleep when I left home, and I dare say is still sleeping in happy ignorance of this awful tragedy," says Mortimer Lytton.

"I wish I could be spared any further discussion of this horrible subject. Last night's work has left me to-day a childless woman—without a friend in the world!"

CHAPTER VIII.

MORTIMER LYTTON returned to Palgrave road, to see his friend Dormer Townley seated in a softly-cushioned chair, with his feet in Berlin wool slippers, on the mantelpiece.

The opening of the door roused him.

"Hello, old fellow!—where have you been?"

He turned round to look in his friend's face, and was startled by its expression.

"Really, now, Lytton, you shouldn't frighten a fellow like that. Whatever is the matter?"

"There is something very shocking the matter, but you must not agitate or upset yourself. There has been an accident—a shocking accident, Townley."

"Aw—railway or coal mine—whatever it may be, it cannot affect you or me."

"It is not a railway or a colliery accident, and it affects all who were ever interested in poor little Flossie Lorrimer," answered Mortimer Lytton, very gravely.

"Who?" shouts Dorner Townley, starting to his feet.

"Flossie Lorrimer."

"But why torture a fellow like this? Why don't you tell a fellow what it is? Has any accident befallen Flossy?"

"Yes, a very sad one."

"By Jove! When? Where? I saw her home last night, and left her standing in the garden. I shut the gate myself."

"And after you left her she was attacked by somebody who must have been waiting."

"And is she injured?"

"She is more than injured."

"What do you mean?"

"She is dead."

"Dead! Impossible!"

"There is nothing impossible."

"Flossie Lorrimer dead! Olymph dead?"

"Yes, her mother found her lying in the porch, strangled, at a quarter to one this morning."

"It wanted twenty minutes to one when I returned to the brougham. I looked at my watch as I sat down," said Dorner Townley, as he dropped helplessly in the chair, with his hands over his face.

He appeared to be stupefied, holding his hands to his head, and staring wildly about him—he did not seem to understand another word that was addressed to him. He passively submitted to be led to his room.

For three days he lay in a semi-conscious state, baffling all efforts to rouse him. On the third day he was better, though he did not at once remember the terrible events of the last few days. In the night every little incident came back to him, and he begged to be left alone.

His request was granted, and during the remainder of the night he indulged in bitter tears—tears that brought relief. Next morning he insisted upon going to Larkfield-villa to look for the last time on the face he had loved so well.

No thought of his wronged wife or broken vows disturbed his conscience. Mortimer told him the inquest would be held that day, and offered to accompany him.

"Oh, my darling! my darling!" he moaned, as he seated himself in the brougham in which he took Flossie home for the last time on the night of her death.

The frosty air seemed to revive him, and when they arrived in the Larkfield-road he looked and felt better.

The two men were received by Mrs. Lorrimer with her usual melancholy air. Having learned the object of their visit she burst into tears, protesting she could not enter the room where her darling lay dead. But she summoned Hannah, and giving her the key of the room the two friends followed that sour-visaged domestic upstairs to the first-floor; and having unlocked a door they passed into the darkened room, and in the dim light they could discern the outline of a coffin, supported on treaties, and covered with a black pall edged with white.

Approaching this object Hannah turned down the pall, exposing the still, white face of Flossie Lorrimer. The woman in its one jet of gas, and the light falling on the still lovely features enabled them to note the sad change that was there.

The distortion of the features and muscles caused by the violent death she had died partly remained, as if she had expired in terrible agony.

The fair skin had assumed a yellow cast; the blue eyes were half open; the lips blue and compressed. The golden brown hair was drawn back from the broad forehead, and coiled at the back of the small head; the slim fingers, clasped upon the bosom, were yellow and damp.

Dorner uttered a low sob at sight of the girl he loved, and bending over the coffin hot tears fell upon the dead. He had never before stood face to face with death, and his soul was filled

with an awful terror at sight of that inanimate piece of clay, that had been so lovely, so full of life—the bloom gone from the cheeks, the lustre from the eyes.

The body was shrouded in white, with the awful marks about the throat carefully hid away under delicate lace.

Dorner's dead roses were laid on the cold bosom.

Hannah seeing the impression made upon Dorner, quietly drew the pall over the dead face and turned the gas down.

"You will be late for the inquest, sir. They sat yesterday, and came here to see the body, but they had to adjourn, as they heard you would be able to appear and give evidence to-day," said Hannah, addressing Dorner Townley.

On going downstairs they found Mrs. Lorrimer waiting for them and ready-dressed to go to the inquest. Laying her hand on Dorner's arm, she said,

"Mr. Townley, as you were such a dear friend of my poor girl, there is something I want to tell you that I never mentioned to a living being, not even to poor Flossie, or the coroner's jury yesterday. The girl that I brought up and loved was no child of mine!"

"Not your child!" exclaimed both men together.

"No; she was the child of my young mistress; I was her nurse. My young lady had gone to Constantinople shortly after her marriage, her husband being an *attacké* at the British Embassy.

"After the birth of her baby her health declined rapidly. The doctors advised her to return to England for a short time, as nothing but her native air would benefit her health.

"As I had accompanied my mistress to Constantinople so I returned with her to England. My master also returned with us.

"There were three other servants besides me. We travelled overland by slow stages to France, where we stayed a few weeks. In crossing from Calais to Dover a dense fog wrapped us in semi-darkness when about midway across, which caused the boat to come in collision with a large American Liner which was soon lost in the fog, leaving us to our fate.

"Our vessel was doomed. The captain had the boats lowered. I had the baby, and my master supported my mistress, who was quite helpless with the shock and terror. I was seized by some sailors and lowered into one of the boats with the baby in my arms, but before my master and mistress could be let down the rope snipped and the boat was tossed away from the sinking vessel.

"The last I saw of the child's parents was my lady fainting in her husband's arms on the deck of the doomed ship. Our boat was tossed about for some hours, but as the fog cleared a fierce gale blew, and we were tossed on the beach of a lonely part of the Sussex coast. We were picked up and taken to an hospital, where I lay six weeks between life and death.

"The baby was alive and well-cared for. The authorities thought the child was my own, and I did not undeceive them. I never heard the fate of her parents. I firmly believed they were drowned—I firmly believe so still."

"When quite recovered a lady got me a situation in a gentleman's family, and I placed the baby out to nurse.

"I never made any inquiries after her relations. You may think me wicked for not doing so, but I feared they would take her from me, and I loved her too well to part with her.

"I was ten years in my situation, then I left it for a better. I sent Flossie to school, and gave her as good an education as I could afford. She grew up very beautiful, as you know."

"When fifteen she wished to be trained for the stage, but I objected. She excelled in dancing and singing, and some of the managers hearing of her beauty and talent, offered me large sums for permission to bring her before the public. The temptation was great, and I was poor. I let her go. Since then she has supported me in comfort."

As Mrs. Lorrimer finished her recital she

burst into a passion of tears, sobbing convulsively.

"Is your real name Lorrimer?" asks Mortimer Lytton, being unable to speak with emotion.

"Yes. My dear girl always bore my name."

"You have not told us her father's name."

"His name was Chesney—Sir John Chesney. She was baptised Florence Lillian Chesney."

"And Sir John Chesney was her father!"

"Yes. It was wrong of me to conceal her existence from her kindred, but—"

"It was a crime punishable by law. You have cheated the poor child out of her birthright. Instead of lying foully murdered to-day she would be the inheritor of her father's name and fortune. But perhaps her parents are not dead after all."

"I believe they are," cried the miserable woman, between her sobs. "Oh, pray spare me, and do not mention this at the inquest. It will do no good."

"We will let it rest. Her relatives, if she has any, believe her dead, as well as her parents. But it was very wicked of you, Mrs. Lorrimer," said Dorner Townley, very gravely.

Mortimer offered the lady a seat in the brougham, and they drove to the tavern where the inquest was held. Mrs. Lorrimer had to repeat the evidence of the previous day, and was cross-examined at some length, which made her very wretched.

The coachman testified to driving Mr. Townley and Miss Lorrimer to Larkfield-villa, describing the parting between the gentleman and lady outside the garden-gate, and the gentleman's return to the brougham at twenty minutes to one o'clock; that Mr. Townley had been drinking rather freely, and was slugging during the drive to Palgrave-road.

Dorner gave his evidence in a subdued voice, very gravely detailing the events of that fatal night, from the time they left the Frivolity to the moment he left Flossie kissing her hand to him in the garden. Mortimer Lytton also told all he knew of the affair. So the inquest was over, and the coroner said there was no clear case against anyone, except the woman Mrs. Lorrimer met inside the gate on the night of the murder, if she could be found. The witnesses would have to appear in the police-court on the following day, when the case would be brought before the magistrate.

The police had no further evidence to produce on that occasion. The jury gave a verdict of "wilful murder against some person or persons unknown."

Dorner Townley ordered posters to be printed, offering five hundred pounds reward for the apprehension of the murderer. There was also a Government reward of two hundred pounds.

On the day of the funeral he was much depressed; he had looked for the last time on the loved face, and the sight had wrung his heart. She was so awfully changed.

"I wish I had not looked on her face to-day!" he said to his friend. "I had hoped to retain the memory of her sweet face, in all its fresh young beauty, all my life. Poor Flossy!"

The mourners were Mrs. Lorrimer, Dorner Townley and Mortimer Lytton. Nearly the entire company from the Frivolity attended, and representatives from other theatres and music-halls. The coffin was covered with beautiful and costly wreaths and bouquets.

A long procession followed the funeral from Larkfield-road to Brompton Cemetery, where the remains of the young columbine were to be laid.

When the coffin was lowered into the grave, with its pile of flowers as white as the snow-drifts that covered the ground, Mrs. Lorrimer and Mortimer Lytton drew Dorner away before the first red earth was thrown among the flowers. When the grave was nearly filled the two friends came back and remained until the men laid down their spades.

Mrs. Lorrimer was in the mourning-coach before them. The two friends got in and were driven back to Larkfield-road, when Dorner Townley told Mrs. Lorrimer that as she had

been such a kind mother to poor Flossie, and was rendered destitute by her untimely death, he would do something for her that would place her above want. He would invest two thousand pounds in her name, and she would receive the interest at five per cent. while she lived. He was about to leave England for an indefinite period, but he would first order a white marble memorial to mark the last resting-place of Olymphy the Columbine.

CHAPTER IX.

A few weeks had passed since the remains of fair Flossie were laid in the grave. Dormer Townley had departed from the bijou house in Palgrave-road, and from London altogether. Mortimer Lytton was sitting over a late breakfast, when there was a ring at the front-door bell.

"Who can it be?" thought Mortimer Lytton, as he held the damp morning paper before the blazing fire to air. But the next moment Mike's tap was heard at the door, and then his curly head was pushed inside.

"Mistress Lorrimer, sir."

"Oh, show the lady in, Mike."

"Faith! it's me self needn't trouble to show the lady in. She's showin' herself in, yer 'oner."

Mike disliked Mrs. Lorrimer, and he made no attempt to conceal it.

"How do you do, Mr. Lytton?" said the lady, as she entered the room, sweeping aside her crimp-covered skirt as she seated herself on the chair Mortimer Lytton placed for her. Her thin, white face looked thinner and whiter by contrast with her deep mourning-dress and bonnet.

"Ah! Mrs. Lorrimer, I am glad to see you looking better."

"I thought I would like to call before leaving London to attend upon Lady Gore-Lumley."

"Oh! you are going to Sandymount! You have decided upon taking that situation?"

"Yes. Sir William has highly recommended me to her ladyship's husband as a competent person to wait upon his delicate young wife; and what Dr. Clarkson says is law."

"I hope it will suit you, and I am sure that Mr. Townley will be pleased to hear that you are comfortable."

"Have you heard from Mr. Townley lately?" she asked, with a careless air.

"About a fortnight ago I had a telegram from Paris. He is very uncertain in his movements."

"Does Mrs. Townley accompany her husband?" she asked.

"No."

The answer was given snappishly, as though the question annoyed him deeply.

"Will you answer me a question, Mr. Lytton? You have seen Mrs. Dormer Townley. Is she dark or fair?" persists the lady.

Mortimer Lytton looked up and saw the woman's pale grey eyes fixed upon him with a look that disconcerted him.

"Mrs. Townley is very fair," he answers, rather reluctantly.

"One question more, Mr. Lytton, and I have done. Have you ever seen a ring like this before?"

Drawing her left hand from her muff, she held it towards him. On the third finger, and over her black kid glove, he saw a curious ring of old yellow gold. As he bent eagerly forward to examine it the lustre of the gems dazzled him.

The centre was a small Maltese cross of large rubies, set in a double row of small diamonds. The blaze of the rubies and the scintillating lustre of the diamonds blended in a weird, sinister glitter in the dull light of the January day.

At sight of the ring Mortimer Lytton gave a start of surprise; then, as his eyes became accustomed to its brilliancy, it occurred to him that he had seen the costly gem before, but where he could not remember.

"Yes, I have seen that ring before, or one very like it," he said, after a lapse of a few seconds.

"Where?"

"I cannot remember. Is it your own, madam?"

"No. How should I become possessed of such a gem? I found it, but I have a clue to the owner."

"Oh, indeed! The owner will be very pleased to get it back. Have you advertised for the owner?"

"Oh, no."

The lady uttered the last two words with a peculiar smile that did not escape her companion's notice.

"Well, I am sure I have seen that ring before, but I cannot recall the time or place."

The peculiar smile still lingers on the lady's face.

"You will remember!" she said, rising.

"Are you going, Mrs. Lorrimer?"

"Yes, I shall reach Sandymount at eleven to night."

"Then I shall explain to Mr. Townley when I write. I shall always be pleased to hear from you, and so will he for poor Flossie's sake."

"Thank you, Mr. Lytton! I shall let you know how I like my new home, as I cannot communicate with Mr. Townley while he is travelling. Good-bye!"

CHAPTER X.

MORE than two years have passed since the young columbine of the *Frivolity* was foully murdered on the threshold of the lonely house in the Larkfield-road; and though the reward has been doubled by order of Dormer Townley, the perpetrator of the foul deed has not been brought to justice.

The scene is changed from the wintry gloom of the London suburb to the wide expanse of the breezy Sussex downs in all their summer glory.

There is an unfrequented stretch of wooded rock, where the trees and grass grow tall and rank, and the pathless tracks of underwood flourish undisturbed.

In this unpromising spot an old acquaintance of the reader's lost his way on a hot July day.

He has been half-an-hour trying in vain to regain the high road, from which he deviated in search of sport, fowling-piece in hand.

He is seeking a short cut to the house of a gentleman in the neighbourhood, where he had been staying a few days.

(Continued on page 232.)

Extract from Chapter XI. of a STANDARD Book on MOTHERS, by Mrs. HENRY KING PARKS, Morscroft House, Malvern Link, Worcester-shire:—

"In all cases such as these Vogeler's Curative Compound will effect a speedy and permanent cure if it be within the power of medicine to cope with the disease. I have carefully examined this remarkable Compound, and tested its efficacy in several severe cases, and I can bear personal testimony to its merits as a thoroughly safe and reliable remedy, and although I am not, as my readers are aware, an advocate of proprietary medicines as a general rule, yet I feel I would be wanting in my duty if I failed to counsel my readers to give it a fair trial, being fully persuaded that their experience will tend to confirm the very high opinion I have formed regarding it. I shall only add that if circumstances compelled me to seek the aid of 'medicine in stomach complaint and allied ailments,' Vogeler's Curative Compound is the 'medicine to which I should pin my faith.'

This marvellous remedy, the end of the century wonder, is made from the formula of one of the greatest living physicians, now in active practice in the West End of London, and is sold by all reliable medicine dealers throughout the country in 1s. 1½d. and 2s. 6d. sizes. It is the only remedy of its kind that can claim to be made from a physician's formula and is safe, sure and never failing in cases of Indigestion, Constipation, Sick headache, Nervousness, and all Liver, Kidney, and Stomach disorders.

DOLLY'S LEGACY.

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CHAPTER X.—(continued)

PERFECT silence followed, until at Westbourne Park, while the ticket-collectors were going their round, Mrs. Dell once more raised the handkerchief over the sleeper's face. She still slept on; no change was visible on her calm features.

"I am very thankful," breathed Mrs. Dell, almost as though she had forgotten she had a listener. "Things will be easier if she does not wake until we are safe in our hotel."

The Duke suddenly interposed.

"Does she always sleep away her life like this?"

Mrs. Dell seemed surprised.

"Lucy does sleep a great deal, but just now she is under the influence of an opiate which our doctor administered before she left home. I should never have got her away without."

"Lucy," thoughtfully; "it is a pretty name!"

"Lucy Dell. Poor child! afflicted as she is, her name is of little consequence."

"Lucy Dell!"

The Duke of Portsea had a good memory, and he was unusually impressed by this little incident. He made no note of the name, he made no entry in his pocket-book descriptive of the afflicted girl's face, and yet he knew perfectly well that neither face nor name could be forgotten by him!

"Do you make any stay in town, Mrs. Dell?" She shrugged her shoulders.

"Only till I know the doctor's verdict on my child. It may be I shall have to go home alone. All my friends warn me it would be better for Lucy to be in an asylum."

The Duke of Portsea shuddered.

"She is too young and fragile for that. Madam, take an old man's advice, and keep your child with you. No care and medical skill surpass a mother's love."

She sighed.

"I wish I were free to follow your advice."

"And are you not?"

"I told you I am a widow."

"Which surely leaves you freer."

"No. There are relations on the father's side who would interfere if they deemed I was acting injudiciously—keen-sighted men of business, who would not understand a mother's love."

"What doctor are you going to?"

"I hardly know."

"Cleave Foster is a first-rate man for anything mental."

She shook her head.

"The choice will not rest with me."

"With whom, then?"

"Her guardian."

"And where shall you stay?" He was wondering a little whether she was as wealthy as everything about her seemed to indicate.

"At the Langham. I have telegraphed for a suite of rooms. My maid has gone on already to prepare for us."

Then the Duke of Portsea made an offer, which, coming from one of his rank and dignity, may fairly be called a very generous one.

"I fear you will have a sad and lonely time, even though this is one of London's gayest months. Will you allow my wife to call upon you? I am quite sure the Duchess of Portsea would do her best to be a help and a consolation to you."

Mrs. Dell clasped her hands, as though in the most fervent gratitude.

"I should be too thankful, your Grace," she said, energetically. "If you knew how I have dreaded this journey, how I shrink from its object, you would understand what it will be to me in the vast wilderness of London to see a woman's friendly face!"

"I am sure my wife will be a comfort to you. The Duchess has a knock of winning people's hearts. We have no daughters of our own, but she always takes an interest in all young girls, and I am sure she will have a special pleasure in ministering to one so lovely and so afflicted as

your Lucy. To-morrow you will doubtless be engaged, but the day after I shall do myself the pleasure of bringing my wife to see you."

Mrs. Dell was so delighted that the tears stood in her eyes.

"I can't thank you enough, your Grace, but a widow's prayers will surely follow you, and the God of the fatherless will reward you for your kindness and compassion."

"Tut, tut!" said the Duke, pleasantly; "it's a mere trifling, Mrs. Dell, and a real pleasure to ourselves, I assure you."

The train was steaming slowly into the terminus now, and still that motionless figure in the corner had given no signs of life.

The Duke begged Mrs. Dell to command his services, and she did so to the extent of begging him to hail her a porter; further, she declared, she could manage very well.

But his Grace was a very considerate man, specially so where women were concerned. He would not leave her until he had seen a comfortable cab brought, with the luggage on the top; then he assisted the porter to carry that helpless burden and lay it on the seat beside Mrs. Dell; this done, he raised his hat with every token of respect, and said,—

"Good-night, madam. I look forward to the pleasure of our next meeting."

He gave the word of command to the driver and watched the cab out of sight with its load before he even thought of the luxurious brougham most likely to be waiting for himself.

"Why, I might have placed this at Mrs. Dell's disposal," he muttered, regretfully, as he took his seat in his own carriage, and his footman waited on him with assiduous care. "What an idiot I was! It actually never struck me, till I saw James, that Muriel would have sent."

He called her Muriel still in his thoughts, though to the outer world she was her Grace the Duchess of Portsea.

It was late when he reached Bruton-street, but a *recherché* repast awaited him, and the wife who for thirty years had made the sunshine of his life was there to welcome him.

She watched his face anxiously, and became alarmed at its grave, half-sad expression.

"Dear" (you see their new honours were so recent she had not learnt yet to call him Duke) "what is the matter?"

"The matter? Nothing, Muriel."

"You seem so grave."

"I met with a very sad case in the train. I think it made me serious. I fell to wondering why our lot was so perfect. Except Bertie's accession to matrimony I don't believe we have even had a real trouble."

His wife bent and kissed him as he sat, theirs was a very true and real union. While she had her husband and son nothing else mattered very much to the Duchess of Portsea.

"I suppose you haven't persuaded Bertie to change his mind, and accompany us to the Abbey?"

She shook her head.

"I have done my best, but he says he must go to Northshire to-morrow or Friday!"

"I wonder what the attraction is."

"We shall know some day," thinking of her boy's half confidence. "Now, I am waiting to hear your story."

"I don't understand. What story?"

"About the sad case you met in the train."

"Ah! Muriel, I have promised you will go and see them. I am sure you might be a comfort to the poor mother, and there is nothing repulsive or terrifying about the girl; she looks just like a beautiful unconscious child."

"I will go, certainly," said the Duchess, when she had listened to all he could tell her. "I am very glad you thought of my doing so."

Two days later she ordered the carriage to the 'Langham Hotel,' directing the footman to inquire for Mrs. Dell. The servant returned promptly; no such lady was staying there, nor was anyone of that name expected.

The Duchess was so hard to convince that an employé of the hotel came to the carriage. To him she explained briefly that the Duke had actually seen Mrs. Dell into a cab, and given the

driver orders to take her to the 'Langham Hotel.'

"It was on Wednesday evening soon after nine at the Paddington Station."

The waiter consulted the books of the Hotel, he made every possible inquiry, but he could only return to her Grace with the same answer.—

"Mrs. Dell was not at the Langham, nor was she expected there!"

CHAPTER XL

FRIDAY is generally deemed an unlucky day. There are many of us who would scorn to be called superstitious who yet shrink from commencing any new undertaking on that day of the week.

But Herbert Lord Aserton was quite free from such prejudices. He naturally wished to rejoin his *fiancée* at the earliest possible date, and Friday was the first day by which he could leave London he accordingly fixed on Friday.

He called in Bruton-street the night before his departure, and both the Duke and Duchess were struck with the brightness of his face. Never since his boyhood had they seen him so joyous and free from care. He discussed Portsea Abbey with them, showing an interest in the old place which delighted them; and when his mother reproached him for not accompanying them he laughed, and said she would tell him to stay away if she knew his temptation.

"But you will come soon?" pleaded her Grace, who, mother-like, could not enjoy any home, however splendid, without her boy.

"In the autumn," returned Herbert, with a smile. "When I have transacted the business I have in hand we shall be very pleased to come to Portsea if you invite us."

"We!" repeated the Duke, incredulously. "Has it come to that, Herbert?"

"Yes," returned his son, with a gleam of happiness in his dark eyes. "You can't either of you reproach me, for you know you have advised me to marry more than twenty times."

Both his parents made a strange mistake. They guessed the "business" alluded to to mean a proposal. They little imagined that was over; and when Herbert spoke of "us" he meant by Christmas he should have a wife, not merely a *fiancée*.

"Who is she, Bertie?" asked his mother. "Have we ever seen her?"

"Remember, my boy, you are the last of our name," said the Duke, gravely; "make a prudent choice."

Herbert smiled.

"Pray did you think of prudence when you were young?"

Then his tone changed.

"I have followed your example, father, and fallen in love. My little girl is fair enough for a princess, but I don't think I ever troubled about that. All I required was that, like yours, my marriage should be one of mutual love."

A dozen questions poured down upon him, but Herbert would not answer them. She was an orphan of gentle birth, penniless and beautiful; that was all the description he vouchsafed of his bride, and the Duke and Duchess had to be content.

"So that he is happy," thought the mother, "what matters rank and fortune!"

"Herbert is as proud as I am," thought the father; "I need not fear him. He could not love a woman unfit to bear his name."

And before going to Bruton-street Lord Aserton slipped a tiny note of three lines into the nearest pillar-box.

"SWEETHEART.—To-morrow at eight o'clock, at our old trysting-place. Twelve hours after you receive this—we shall be together, free to plan out our future.—Yours till death,

"HERBERT."

Not by his title would he sign that letter—he really did not know if Dolly had even heard of his new honours—but signed himself to her by his simple baptismal name, Herbert.

Fortune did not favour the lover—that part of fortune, at any rate, of which the elements are symbolical—for a more wretched day has seldom dawned than that appointed for Lord Aserton's journey.

Honestly, save for the budding trees, it was more like November than May. The sky was one leaden grey, unrelieved even by a streak of blue; the rain fell in torrents, no mere summer showers, but a steady, drenching downpour. The east wind blew chill and cold—in fact, it was a day when one felt unconsciously depressed without knowing why; and you wanted a very strong sense of inward happiness to help you to bear cheerfully the desolate aspect of the outer world.

Lord Aserton had the inward happiness right enough, but still the state of the elements filled him with dismay.

He had parted from Lord Devereux on such terms that it was impossible he could enter Field Royal as his guest. He could not throw himself upon the compassion of the Countess, and expect her to sympathise with his love affairs, because he was perfectly aware Lady Desmond desired him for a son-in-law. No. Clearly his courtship must persevere to be carried on in the open air; and fondly as he looked forward to meeting his Dolly he could not wish her to expose herself to the fury of such a storm. Certainly fate was against him!

But things seemed a little better when he was actually in Northshire. He put up at the Devereux Arms, and by the time he had dined and smoked a cigar the weather seemed to have improved. It was still far from propitious—damp and muddy under foot, the wind as cold and high as ever, but the actual rain had ceased. Warmly wrapped up Dolly might venture down to the river bank without any great danger to her health.

He was there before eight had begun to chime, there at the spot where he had first told her of his love, there where he had first claimed her for his own, and struggled with his better angel, which whispered it was sin to speak of love to another woman while poor erring Magdalene was yet alive. Well, now he was here again, free to claim his darling before the world, free to give her not only love, but honour, name, and rank—and she was not there!

He waited over an hour. He started at every sound, fancying he heard her footsteps, only to be disappointed.

"She is afraid of the weather," he decided, sadly. "Of course, I was foolish to expect her to-night."

And yet he remembered the bleak spring evening, when he had found her trembling with sorrow on that very spot, Dolly had seemed to him not over anxious about her own health. Yes, it was passing strange.

Could the family at Field Royal have discovered her secret, and have prevented her leaving the house, not forcibly perhaps, but by assigning her some duty at that particular time? But this suggestion would not do—he knew the arrangements of the house so well. Mabel invariably retired early—from the moment she was handed over to her nurse Dolly was her own mistress.

"It must be the weather," thought Lord Aserton, for about the fiftieth time. "Of course she's quite right to be careful, poor darling."

And yet this thought brought him no comfort. He repeated the words over and over again, almost like a parrot rehearsing a lesson, but they did not convince him in the least. The moment he had uttered them he was asking himself as anxiously as ever why Dolly had failed him!

Back to the inn with a troubled face. Herbert had a knack of winning golden opinions from the lower classes. His hostess, a buxom ma'man, was already devoted to him, and as she waited on him was delighted to gossip a little harmlessly, and to tell him with honest pride how her daughter was once maid to one of the Ladies Devereux.

Herbert listened with more interest than such a simple matter should have had for him, and hearing Mrs. Bean was sending a letter to her daughter the next day he determined to send one to Dolly enclosed in it. How he arranged

matters with the hostess, how he arranged to interest her most thoroughly I don't know, but before he went to bed the letter was written and entrusted to her; besides which Mrs. Bean had arranged, if matters went very badly with the lovers, to receive Miss Smith at a moment's notice, and protect the young lady in all honour and courtesy during the three days which, in spite of the licence in Herbert's pocket, might have to elapse before she could be transformed into Viscountess Asherton.

"This house is called the Devereux Arms, my lord," she admitted, "but we've little cause to like the family. The last Earl was a good friend to us, and for her sake we were glad to send our girl to the Castle; but the present Lord Desmond has been a hard landlord to us, and as to the Countess she's a perfect skindint. My 'Melia says she do believe Lady Desmond grudges every penny she spends."

"Do you know Miss Smith?" asked Herbert, with a strange yearning to hear her spoken of.

"Surely, sir; my 'Melia, which is nurse or maid to Lady Mabel, has pointed out the young lady to me. A sweet pretty face she has, but yet I was sorry enough to see her at Field Royal."

"Why, Mrs. Bean?"

"She favours the late Countess, my lord, her who was drowned in the river."

"I have noticed the resemblance myself."

"Ay, the moment I saw Miss Smith I thought it was the Countess Viola herself; then I pitied the poor young lady, for I guessed she'd have a nice time of it when the mistress came home."

"Why should she? Lady Desmond could not think it a crime for Miss Smith to resemble her sister-in-law."

"Ah! my lord, you don't know the ins-and-outs. Many's the time I've thought over them since I saw that pretty creature. But, there, she'll be Lady Asherton, and it's easy to see you'll take good care of her, my lord."

It was growing late; he had had a long journey and a cruel disappointment at its end. He felt tired; and so, instead of asking Mrs. Bean for the story she was dying to relate, he took the large old-fashioned chamber candlestick in his hand and went upstairs to bed.

But he could not sleep. Possessed of a good digestion, perfect health, and an easy conscience, Herbert's nights were usually of the most peaceful conceivable description, but certainly this one was an exception. The crime could not be laid to the charge of the Devereux Arms. His large, old-fashioned chamber was clean and neat as a new plumb; chintz curtains were closely drawn before the lattice windows, the four-post bed had hangings of spotless dimity and fragrant lavender-scented sheets—just the sort of couch to induce repose; but no. Had he been the most superstitious of mortals or the most suffering of invalids the Vicount could not have fared worse. He tossed uneasily on his pillows, haunted by the most fearful forebodings.

"This will never do," decided Herbert, with a sudden determination to conquer his wakefulness just by force of his strong will. "I shall look like a miserable scarecrow, and have my darling repenting her bargain when she sees me to-morrow—to-day, rather, for I'm sure I heard it strike two just now. I'll shut my eyes and go to sleep, whatever happens."

Ah! reckless boast—Lord Asherton has to pay dearly for it. In less than ten minutes he was asleep, but the scene that followed was so awful in its terrible significance, he heartily repented slumber having closed his eyes.

He thought he stood by the banks of the silvery Way, just at the spot where he and Dolly first met, and where he had waited for her so vainly to-night. He stood there alone, his eyes bent upon the water with a nameless sensation of trouble on his heart, when suddenly he felt a hand upon his shoulder—a hand that could be felt, whose touch, gentle as it was, thrilled him through and through. He started and looked up, not knowing, nor understanding in the least what he expected to see.

There stood beside him a woman, nay, a girl, of singular beauty. For one moment he believed

it was his darling, only grown graver, with a touch of sadness on her face he had never seen there before; then the strange vision shook her head mournfully, as though to tell him he was wrong, and he became aware that the apparition was not his Dolly, but a beautiful resemblance of her—a picture of her as she might be if time and sorrow laid their mark upon her, for, young as was the beautiful face raised to his, it lacked the hopefulness of extreme youth, the almost childish unconsciousness which was Dolly's greatest charm.

One time he essayed to speak, but the words would not come; he could only stand there motionless.

The vision seemed to understand. She stretched towards him her hand—the left hand, and on its third finger he saw a broad band of fine rich gold; then as she met his glance at it for the first time she spoke,

"Save my child!"

Herbert trembled. What did it mean? Was he the victim of a dream, or could there really be such things as supernatural visitants? If so, his darling must surely be in dire peril if her mother was permitted to wander back from the shadowy spirit-world to warn him of her danger.

"Save my child!"

"I will."

Oh! how hoarse and unnatural his voice sounded even to himself.

The woman touched her ring.

"This, which brought my misery, shall bring her happiness," she said, in a kind of sad, far-off musical voice. "I have seen it all. There is nothing but sorrow for my darling until a ring like this is on her finger."

"It is my dearest wish to place such a ring there. I love her as my life."

A smile crossed the sad, sweet face.

"You love her, but you have lost her."

"No."

She bowed her head.

"Lost, poor wanderer, lost. In peril dire, in sorrows oft; but you will save her."

"Only show me how."

"I may not."

It seemed to Herbert he fell on his knees and implored her to have pity, and to give him a clue to her meaning. For some time she only shook her head; at last she said slowly,

"Distrust all you hear, dread those who seem her best friends, forget all they tell you, remember but this thing—the loved you."

With one wave of her hand the woman sped from him, and the scene changed. It was a large, handsome apartment of an old London house, and a dozen women of all ages were scattered about it. Some were beautiful. All were nicely dressed, yet, though Herbert understood nothing of what they were doing there, he felt, reluctantly, they were not happy. He seemed to wander round the room until at last he saw a girl nursing a cat—a girl with a sad, hopeless face, whose violet eyes seemed to have shed tears until they were dull and sunken.

"Dolly!" he exclaimed, rapturously. "Dolly!"

He would fain have clasped her to his heart, fain have borne her in his arms far from all those strange scenes; but between him and her was a barrier impossible to pass. It was perfectly transparent. Only when he essayed to get to Dolly did he become aware of its existence. It was not glass or crystal; indeed, it resembled more a kind of atmospheric wall. Dolly was one side, he the other; neither could cross, and as this came home to him with bitter truth he heard a hideous laugh, and, turning round, was Lady Devereux watching him with a face full of malignant triumph.

"This is awful!"

Such were Herbert's first words on awaking. He stretched himself, sat up in bed with a sigh of unutterable relief, as he recalled the awful incidents of his dream. He had certainly been awake at two. It was now half after six. In those four hours what a martyrdom he had undergone! What horrors even now seemed torturing his imagination!

From many dreams one wakes, it is true, with a recollection of disagreeables; but this

passes off as time goes on. But to Herbert each quarter of an hour chimed by the old wooden clock in the hall only made his remembrances more vivid and startling. He was not a superstitious man; but though laughing at the idea of ghosts and such-like instances, he did feel as if there was something serious in his dream; something, indeed, so serious that he resolved, when once he held his darling in his arms, she should not return even for half-an-hour to Field Royal.

His original plan had to be slightly modified to accomplish this. He had written to Dolly, begging her to meet him some time in the morning. He meant, then, to take her straight to the Devereux Arms and place her under the special protection of Mrs. Bean, while he went on to the village, interviewed the clergymen, and made all arrangements for their wedding taking place the next day.

He would not return to the Devereux Arms, but would meet Dolly at the church, and take her to London the moment she was his wife. No slur could thus rest upon her name, and she would be spared all disagreeables from the Desmond family. Mrs. Bean entered into the affair heart and soul. She told Herbert, when she brought in his breakfast, the gardener had taken the letter and package to 'Melia an hour before, and 'Melia being a most business-like young person, would give his note at once to its proper owner.

Herbert knew that Dolly had always claimed as her own the first hour after the schoolroom breakfast; doubtless she would avail herself of it to come to him. He pushed his toast and eggs away untouched, and set off for the trysting-place.

Early as he was someone was waiting for him. Not Dolly. Oh no—and how his heart sank as he discovered that—but a neatly-dressed handmaid, whom he clearly remembered to have seen sometimes in attendance on Lady Mabel, and who introduced herself to him as Mrs. Bean's 'Melia.

"And you have brought me a message?" he began, eagerly.

The girl's honest face clouded over.

"No, my lord. I have brought you back your letter," she said, simply.

"Brought me back my letter!"

"Mother wrote and told me"—here 'Melia blushed—she had a lover of her own, and was very full of sympathy for others in the same predicament—"that you would be here this morning waiting for Miss Smith, and so I made bold to come, my lord. I thought it'd be such dreary work for you to go on waiting hour after hour, and she not even know it, poor dear young lady."

With an awful fear at his heart Herbert laid one hand upon her arm.

"Where is she?"

"I don't know, my lord."

"You can't mean she has left the Castle?" went on Lord Asherton. "Girl, tell me everything. Indeed, indeed, it is kindest for me in the end that you should do so."

"I don't like to."

"Why?"

The girl shuddered.

"It'll make you sorry."

"Poor 'Melia she was very tender-hearted, and she shrank from the thought of inflicting pain."

"I wouldn't go to believe it if I was you, my lord, for there's not one of us servants do. We all say Miss Smith was too good for that sort of thing."

"Tell me all," pleaded Herbert, driven almost wild by these half-confidences.

"My lady came home quite unexpectedly, my lord," began 'Melia, "as you may have heard."

He bowed his head.

"She never cared much for Lady Mabel, you know, and so it wasn't strange; beyond just ten minutes or so in her own room, she never tried to see her, and so, until last Tuesday, neither she nor the Earl had ever seen Miss Smith."

Herbert listened breathlessly.

"I used to wonder," went on 'Melia, "if she

minded—Miss Smith, I mean; but I don't think she did. She was sad enough when she first came to the Castle, but she had grown quite bright and happy like. Tuesday morning, I remember in particular, she went about the house singing just like a bird."

It was the day on which she must have received Herbert's letter—the letter written just after hearing he was free, and so full of joyous hope. The coincidence struck on him even then.

"But she changed then," pursued 'Melia. "She saw the Countess that day, and the Earl, too, I think; and by evening she went about with such a wan, pale face. I asked her if she had a headache, but she only smiled, and said she felt nervous, as though something dreadful were going to happen. I shall never forget her face as she said it, my lord. You see, it was the last time I ever saw her."

"The last time you saw her!" horror-struck; "but that is days ago."

"Yes, my lord. Wednesday morning a message came from the Countess. Lady Mabel was not to leave her room, and, of course, I had to stay there waiting on the little girl. It was not till I went down to the servants' hall to supper after Lady Mabel was asleep that I heard Miss Smith had gone."

"Gone!"

"She went to London by the five o'clock express, my lord. The carriage took her to the station. I mind the time well, because the Earl had been to London, and he came home late that night."

"But why did she go?"

'Melia shook her head.

"Lady Desmond kept her room all day Wednesday, Thursday, and part of yesterday, and no one was allowed to go in to her but Lady Bertha. Last night, at six o'clock, a great bell was rung, and all the servants summoned to the dining-room. The Earl made a speech to us then that he had discovered Miss Smith in dishonest practices, and she had robbed him and the Countess of many valuable articles. She pretended to be summoned to London by telegram on account of a friend's illness, and had thus escaped. Lord Desmond forbade her name being mentioned at the Castle, and said it was only on account of her youth he did not set the police on her track."

"She never did it!"

"Never! Oh, my lord, so we all said, and Mrs. Bond, the housekeeper (she's never had a penny from her master; you see, my lord, having been left so well-to-do by the late Earl), she got up, and said quite bravely—"

"I packed Miss Smith's bag, my lord—at least I saw all that went into it, and I am ready to swear there was nothing belonging to you inside."

"The Earl he grew almost livid with rage; but the Countess, she answered,—

"Doubtless, Miss Smith got rid of her ill-gotten gains before her flight."

"Then, what is missing, my lady?" asked Bond; but she couldn't get an answer.

The Earl just dismissed us, and said it'd be a warning to us, he hoped. We were all filling out quiet enough, though some of us were brimming over with indignation; but Mrs. Bond the least went up to the Earl.

"My lord," she said, respectfully, "I've lived in your house—for many years, but I shall leave to-morrow. Not being a paid servant I have no notice to give, but I'd like my lady or some one appointed by her to look over my things before I pack up, for I shouldn't care to be branded as a thief, though I'm as sure of my own innocence as I am of the sweet young lady whose name you've used so cruelly."

Herbert uttered a low "Beast!" In spite of his awful anxiety about Dolly he could thoroughly enjoy the discomfiture of the Desmonds.

"Mrs. Bond was as good as her word," went on 'Melia. "I have left her packing up; she's always been kind to me, and I just told her where I was coming. She means to spend a day or two with mother before she leaves Northshire, and she told me to beg you, if you had ever loved

Miss Smith, to let her speak to you before you go back to London."

"And this is all you can tell me?"

"I'm afraid so, my lord. This letter," giving him the one he had written from London, "came yesterday morning, and I just put it into my pocket lest the Countess should see it. Mrs. Bond, maybe, could tell you more, my lord. You see, she was with Miss Smith to the moment of her going, and I never saw her after Tuesday night."

"I don't know how to thank you," said Herbert, after pressing upon 'Melia a very substantial contribution towards the furniture she and her "young man" needed ere they could set up housekeeping. "You have done me good service."

"I wish I could have done better for you, my lord," said the girl, regretfully. "You see, I loved Miss Smith."

"She was good and true!" murmured poor Herbert, sadly. "How could they hate her so?"

"She had a kind word for everyone," said 'Melia, simply, "and, for all she might be poor, anyone could see she was just as much a lady as the Countess herself. If you should find her, my lord, I'd get you to give her my duty, and tell her I never believed one of the cruel things they said."

"If you should find her!" Strong man though he was, Lord Asherton trembled. Had it really come to "if"?

He bade good-bye to 'Melia, and walked back to the "Devereux Arms," his mind full of conflicting thoughts. One thing he never doubted—his darling's perfect innocence. He was spared the worst pang of all.

He loved Dolly as trustfully, his faith in her was as entire as though she had not disappointed him at the trying-place last night. Appearance might be against her, but never a doubt of her would enter Herbert's head. She was still his ideal of all that was pure, and true, and womanly.

He still yearned for the right to shield her from all sorrow. What tortured him was no doubt of her worthiness, but the awful mystery that enshrouded her fate. How was he to find her?

It was so puzzling, so utterly bewildering! He knew she had not a relative in the world; he had never heard her mention even a friend. Admitting that she left Field Royal of her own free will, at whose bidding had she done so?

Mrs. Bean met him at the threshold of the "Devereux Arms," with a cloud of pity on her honest face.

"This is a heavy blow, my lord."

"You have heard, then?"

"The housekeeper's here, my lord; she's been talking to me this half-hour. Would you like to see her?"

"Ay."

Mrs. Bean brought Mrs. Bond into Lord Asherton's parlour, and lingered there herself. She felt a kind of share in the young nobleman's disappointment, and never thought her presence would be unwelcome. I doubt myself if Herbert even knew she was there. Mrs. Bond looked at him pityingly.

"Melia's told you, then, my lord?"

"Yes. But there is a mystery I cannot fathom. Of course the charge against her is a cruel lie; but why did she go—why leave the shelter of her home, the house where she knew I should come to claim her?"

Mrs. Bond started.

"Send you for her, my lord?"

"Send for her! No!"

"She had a telegram on Wednesday. I took it up to her myself, thinking I'd comfort her if it was bad news. I never saw the message, my lord, but from what I heard, the broken words that fell from the poor girl, I gathered that you were ill—dying, even, it seemed, and your lady mother had sent for Miss Smith to Bruton-street to see you for the last time."

His face was colourless as marble. He listened in strained, agonised attention.

"How do you know this?"

Mrs. Bond melted.

"I always thought you loved her, my lord. I

didn't see how you was to help it. As she sat with the telegram in her hand the words 'Herbert—dying—a last good-bye—oh, if I could die with him!—He must be dying, or his mother would not send for me!' All this made me think of what I have told you. Besides, Miss Smith asked me where Bruton-street was."

Herbert looked like a man distraught with terror.

"I never was dangerously ill in my life. My mother never heard Miss Smith's name!"

"Then that telegram must have been a forgery," said Mrs. Bond, shrewdly. "I mistrusted it."

"Why?"

"It came from the village, and a little boy brought it. Our telegrams—and the master has dozens—come from the town by a man on horseback."

The simple woman meant the small village post-office was not competent to send out a telegram; but for the issues at stake Herbert must have smiled.

"Unskilled labour might make a difference in a word or two; but this telegram seems to have been a lie from first to last."

"And a good thing, my lord—that you are not ill, of course, I mean."

He shook his head.

"Think what issue must be at stake before a man takes such a desperate step as forging a telegram; besides, Bond, that poor child left to go to my supposed death-bed last Wednesday. This is Saturday! Where is she now?"

The woman sobbed aloud. They had never thought of this view of the case.

"I shall go to the post-office," said Asherton, resolutely. "Perhaps they may be persuaded to tell me something about the telegram."

At first he was refused. The post-mistress declared it was against all the official regulations; but Asherton persisted—he promised never to mention the fact of her compliance.

"Law, me," said a good-tempered girl behind the counter, "don't refuse the gentleman. He says it's a matter of life and death!"

"But the regulations, Matty!"

"Bother the regulations!" said Matty, determinedly. "Here, sir" (Asherton had concealed his name), "it happens I can help you. There were such a lot of names in the message I made a mistake in the first form I wrote it out on. If you just go to the desk the copy's on the floor. Supposing you pick it up by accident the officials can't blame us particularly."

Herbert picked it up "by accident." It was precisely the same as the message Dolly had received, only the spelling of the proper names was muddled, and bore the traces of connection.

"May I take this?"

"Certainly—only we don't give it you."

He promised to remember the distinction, and went back to the inn.

"You are quite right," he told Mrs. Bond. "She was lured away by my supposed illness."

"Do you think she ever reached Bruton-street?"

"I know she did not. I was with my parents on Thursday, and they would have told me."

Mrs. Bean shivered.

"I thought the moment I saw Miss Smith there'd be trouble in store for her the moment my lady the Countess came home."

"So did I," echoed Bond. "I kept them apart for days. I longed to warn Miss Smith, only somehow I couldn't."

"But warn her of what?" questioned Lord Asherton. "I don't understand."

Both women sighed.

"You don't know the ins-and-outs, my lord. Maybe, you've never heard the prophecy!"

Asherton asked what they meant. The "ins-and-outs" meant the doubt thrown on the Countess Viola's death by her husband's will.

"The present Lady has never had a happy day since," said Bond, firmly. "Never a stranger has come to Field Royal but she has trembled for her children's future. I believe she hated every boy or girl whose age fitted in with Lady Viola's loss. I knew the moment I saw Miss Dolly look at me with my poor lost mistress's



WITH AN AWFUL FEAR HERBERT LAID ONE HAND UPON HER ARM. "WHERE IS SHE?" HE SAID.

violet eyes that there was trouble coming, and I believe——"

She stopped herself abruptly.

"Speak out," urged Herbert. "We are all friends."

"I believe she is our true lady, Lord Asherton. I believe the child Lord Desmond calls a thief, whose name he forbids mentioned in his presence, is in very truth the rightful owner of Field Royal, and—and I believe he knows it!"

Lord Asherton shuddered.

If this was it what hope had he? If the Desmonds were at the bottom of Dolly's disappearance what hope had he of finding her? With so much to gain by hiding her was it likely they would relax their vigilance? If they had stooped to decoy her away by means of a forged telegram they would not stop at much.

And she was alone—his poor little lost love. She had no arm in all the world to lean on, no one to take her part and befriend her—she was powerless, helpless.

Suddenly there flashed on Herbert's mind the memory of his dream. He seemed to feel once more the touch of those slender fingers, to hear once more that voice from shadowland, "Save my child!" He began to understand his wretched night; his disturbed slumbers might really have some bearing on Dolly's fate. From that moment he felt certain she was the child of his godfather, Herbert Earl Desmond.

"I will find her," he cried, speaking aloud, almost unconsciously, in his agitation, "If I have to search the world through. If I have to spend the best years of my life in the quest I will find her! I will never give up my pursuit until I hold my darling in my arms, or," his voice shook, "until I stand by the grave that covers her."

He cross-questioned Mrs. Bond pretty thoroughly, but she could tell him nothing he did not know. He could see she shared his own belief that they had not to seek Miss Smith, but Dorothea Countess of Desmond.

"If that's it," murmured Mrs. Bond, "you'll

have a hard task, my lord. Lady Desmond that rules at Field Royal now is a hard woman, but she loves her children—the Viscount most of all. She'll leave no stone unturned; she'll spare no trouble—I had almost said no sin—to preserve Field Royal for him."

Herbert groaned. It was so true.

"Anyway," he said, gravely, "we have two facts to go upon. Miss Smith entered the five o'clock train last Wednesday; she was alone, had a ticket for London, and believed herself going to Bruton Street. It is how that journey ended we must ascertain first."

And to that end he went up to London that afternoon by the identical five o'clock train, and cross-examined guard and porter, who well-remembered the slight, black-robed figure who had been a passenger the Wednesday before.

"I'm not likely to forget her, sir. She had a sweet face, and she'd been crying bitterly. I remember thinking she was too young for such sorrow. I put her into the carriage with another lady, just those two together."

And the guard who took the train from Gloucester admitted seeing the carriage, and the two ladies in it. They had the compartment to themselves as far as Reading. There a number of passengers joined the train, and he lost sight of them. It would be better to inquire at Paddington.

Herbert followed the advice; he did inquire at Paddington. He backed his inquiries with a golden key, but he gained nothing to help him, even though, skilled in reading character, he knew that his informants were telling him the truth, and doing their best to remember what he asked.

But porters, officials, cab drivers, all were staunch on one point—no young lady alone had arrived at Paddington by that train. As a fact, very few ladies came up by it on Wednesday night, and most of them were elderly, or had their husbands with them. Only one girl seemed to have struck anyone, and she was an invalid,

quite helpless, and had to be carried from the train to a cab.

Asherton shook his head, as though to say she had nothing to do with her whom he sought.

"Well, that was the only young lady who came up by that train, and she had her ma and her pa with her. I saw every passenger who got out, and there wasn't a single other woman under thirty, or, I might say, thirty-five."

Herbert drove off to his chambers almost beside himself, certain of but one thing—his beautiful, violet-eyed darling was lost to him somewhere in the great Babylon of modern London. His golden-haired love was wandering, perhaps in pain and sorrow, perhaps persecuted and despised; while he who loved her more than life could not raise a finger in her defence. In spite of all the trials which he had known, the hour when he realised this was the most bitter in Herbert's life.

(To be continued.)

In New York State there is an extraordinary dam, more than a quarter of a mile long and 216 ft. thick. It turns the whole Croton River into aqueducts, for the supply of New York city. The lake, which holds back 40,000,000,000 gallons of water, is the largest artificial lake known.

One of the many natural wonders of Arizona scenery made accessible by the opening up of rail and stage roads is a remarkable natural bridge, in the Tonto basin, not far from Flagstaff. The bridge is 550 feet long, and spans a canyon some 200 feet deep, at the bottom of which flows the river. The bridge is of rock, and is perfectly proportioned. The under-side is gracefully arched, and the upper perfectly level. The walls of the canyon are honeycombed with caves, in which are a great profusion of stalactites and stalagmites.



THE LETTER WAS VERY SHORT, BUT IT SENT THE BLOOD DANCING THROUGH HIS VEINS.

FRITHERIC

THE BRIDE OF AN HOUR.

—10—
CHAPTER XIX.

HELEN Nairn hardly knew which to pity most, the man who loved Violet Dean so faithfully and so well, or the girl herself to whom fate had been so cruel. A good woman, and singularly happy in her own married life, she could yet feel for those less fortunate than herself. A prudent narrow-minded matron would have prated of marriage vows, and declared the twenty minutes spent at his side in Margrave Church gave Lord Ashdale complete and absolute power over the creature the law called his wife. But Helen was not of this type, and she had but one feeling at her heart—deep intense compassion.

Bernard was almost frightened at her silence. The kindly, blithe little woman, he had always seen so bright and joyful, sat opposite him absolutely dumb, her eyes were wide open with dismay, it really seemed as if her astonishment had taken away her power of speech.

"Please say something," he said almost irritably. Poor fellow, the tension on his nerves was nearly more than he could bear. "Surely, Mrs. Nairn, even if this miserable story is true, you cannot blame her?"

"Blame her," cried Helen. "No indeed, but oh, Bernard, I am troubled, because I feel it is true, and can't you see the misery of her life. She is not twenty, and she may have fifty years more to live. Must she spend them all alone, is she never to have a home like other women. Must she be solitary and desolate for all time because a cruel fate made her Lord Ashdale's bride of an hour?"

Bernard drew his breath hard.

"What is to be done? I promised I would at least tell her his story. I hoped against hope it might be a case of mistaken identity, though every date tallied."

"You must speak to her," said Helen, brokenly, "there is no help for it."

"You know," went on Bernard, "Lord Ashdale declares his wife left him because she doubted the legality of the marriage, but I don't believe it is that she really thinks."

Mrs. Nairn shook her head.

"No! If she believed her marriage illegal she would not have been so desperately anxious to hide herself from him."

Bernard sighed heavily.

"I don't know much of legal matters (they say an author's law is always wrong), but surely that ceremony can't be binding. The Earl says himself, he has never seen his wife since they drove from the church together. Surely if we employed a clever lawyer it would be possible to get the marriage annulled!"

Mrs. Nairn would not hazard an opinion. Her commonsense and her sympathy were at war, and she only said gravely:

"There is only one thing for it, Bernard, you must see Violet Dean yourself. I would spare you the task gladly if I could, but it is you who will have to write to the Earl of Ashdale, and I think you had better tell his story to Violet with your own lips."

She was in the little room where Mr. Nairn kept his father's books. It was called the study, the bookroom, and the library, by turns, a cosy, homelike room, which had always been the girl's favourite resort.

Bernard went in alone, a strange pain at his heart, as he thought of the story he had hoped to tell her at their next meeting, which if Lord Ashdale's statements were true, must now never pass his lips. Violet Dean was leaning back in a big arm-chair. She looked so young and childlike it was difficult to think of her as a runaway wife. Her lips parted in a smile as Bernard entered.

"How good of you to come, Mr. Maxwell, I was so sorry not to see you yesterday. Are you satisfied about *Broken Fetter*, is it really a success?"

"A greater success than I ever dreamed of," he said, taking her hand in his, "thanks to you."

"But you look worried," objected the girl, slowly, "and I thought you would be so pleased."

"I am worried," he confessed, "but chiefly because I am afraid the worry must rest on you. When you appeared as 'Gertrude' on Saturday night out of kindness to me, you had a fear that your mother might be in the theatre and recognise you."

"Yes, but Mrs. Nairn assured me mother could not force me to return to her, and I have got over my fear. Do you mean she really was at the Frivolity?"

"No, but someone else was there who claims to have known you in your girlhood, and to have a right to see you. Miss Dean, Violet, forgive me if I seem cruel, Lord Ashdale called on me to-day to demand your address. He asserts that you are his lawful wife, and a great mistake parted you on your wedding day last November—the very date on which I met you first."

Bernard only knew how he had hoped against hope the Earl was mistaken, when he saw by the growing pallor of her face that the tale was true.

"Don't be frightened, I am not going to faint," she said, as he started up in alarm. "Mr. Maxwell, I believe the law would call me Lady Ashdale; but no mistake parted me from my husband. I left him an hour after our wedding, when I had learned his true character."

"And you are his wife! Great Heaven!"

"I shall never be his wife in anything but name. Mr. Maxwell, will you despise me for deceiving you and accepting your friendship under a false name? I did not know what to do. I felt it would kill me if I was forced to live with Lord Ashdale. I dared not call myself Veronice Leigh, my maiden name, and so I became Violet Dean, sure that the childish school-fellow who died years ago could not suffer from my borrowing her name."

"What you must have suffered!"

"I suffered terribly till I came here. Then the Nairns were so kind to me. I had your friendship and sympathy, and I felt almost happy. You see, I thought perhaps Lord Ashdale had given up seeking me, and I need not be afraid any more."

Truly it was not much she had asked of fate—the permission to work hard in a music shop for eight hours a day in return for her board and ten shillings a week; freedom to earn her own living and keep herself by her own toll, was not a great boon to crave, seeing that she was really an English peeress, and entitled to share a princely fortune. Then came a long silence. The girl was the first to break it.

"Is he very angry?"

"Who?"

"Lord Ashdale."

"He is angry with me for withholding Miss Dean's address. His rôle is that his wife would not have left him, only that she had been made to doubt the legality of her marriage. He affects to think when she is satisfied on that score, she will gladly return to him."

"I will never return!"

Aud Bernard knew that she meant it. The simple assertion from her was worth the most impassioned protests from a more excitable girl.

His silence frightened her.

"You don't want me to go back to him!" she asked, eagerly; "surely you don't think I am bound to spend my life with him. He deceived me cruelly. I was enlightened too late. If only I had known the truth five minutes before the marriage I would have refused to go through with it."

"I want you to go back," he cried. "Great Heaven, no!"

"And you will let me keep the part of 'Gertrude.' I am sure Mr. St. John could not find anyone else at a few hours notice."

"You shall keep it gladly."

"But you seem doubtful. Your very voice is altered. Do you mean that Mrs. Nairn is angry with me, and will not let me stay here any longer?"

"No, dear." The word escaped him in spite of himself. "I am sure she is not angry, but Miss Dean—"

She interrupted him.

"Will you please say Veronics; you know now that Dean is not my real name, and we need not have any more shame."

"I was only going to say that Lord Ashdale seems to me a very determined man. His mind is made up that you are his wife, and he is set on seeing you."

There was a rap at the door then, and Mrs. Nairn came in. She bent over Veronics and kissed her. Bernard felt thankful she had joined them, for though he could assure his poor little friend of the Nairns' sympathy, he was by no means certain they would feel able to keep Lord Ashdale's wife in their house against his will.

"I cannot see Lord Ashdale," said Veronics, to Mrs. Nairn. "I think to be alone with him would kill me."

"I have been thinking," said Helen, quietly, "after Saturday night you may certainly claim to be an actress, and 'Violet Dean' is your stage name, there can be no doubt of that."

"No," said Bernard, "but it hardly helps us."

"I think it does. You can write a note, or I will write it if Lord Ashdale knows your hand, saying that 'Miss Violet Dean' positively declines to see the Earl of Ashdale, or to hold any communication with him."

Veronics looked troubled.

"I know that he is very tenacious about scandal. My mother said once he was the most sensitive man she had ever met. I did not know then what she meant."

"Then you think he would not be capable of presenting himself at the Frivolity and forcing his way behind the scenes?"

"I am sure of it. I think"—and she flushed crimson—"he would be more likely to try and force me to return to him by some trick or artifice. I know that he is most tenacious about

public opinion; he would not even be married at Waldon because he wanted everyone to know I was Sir Lionel Leigh's niece. He will never leave off trying to force me back to him, but he would do nothing to let the world know his wife was Violet Dean the actress."

"Then you are safe," said Helen, simply. "It will not even be necessary to take Mr. St. John into our confidence. We can let him think that, like many another fast man about town, Lord Ashdale wishes to pay attentions to a young and popular actress, and that is why he has tried to obtain your address. Really, Bernard, I think we have been over-anxious. I must see that Violet never goes out alone, and then, I think, we have nothing to fear."

"It must be 'Violet Dean,' even here," said Bernard, in reply to a questioning glance from the girl; "remember walls have ears, and if we adopt Mrs. Nairn's suggestion and write the letter she advises no one must know that you admit you were once Veronica Leigh."

The girl turned to Mrs. Nairn.

"I feel so troubled I can't think clearly, but you quite sure it won't do you any harm having me here? If you think Mr. Nairn would mind, or that it might bring any—any unpleasantry on either of you to be mixed up with a runaway wife, I would go away. I have saved a little money, and I could take a room somewhere."

The tears stood in Helen's eyes.

"You must stay here, dear," she said firmly. "I can answer for my husband as for myself. If I knew of any other place where you would be safer from Lord Ashdale I would let you go there, but I do not; you must stay here, and either I or nurse will drive to the theatre with you every night. Bernard will see you home. I am afraid," she concluded, with a little laugh that lacked her usual merriment, "that you will be let in for an enormous expenditure in cab, for I am sure you must not go in an omnibus; but if Mr. St. John is liberal in the matter of salary that won't matter."

"Lord Ashdale has seen my writing," said Veronics, "and he may remember it; so I should be very grateful if you would write the letter."

"I will write, certainly," said Helen. "I wonder if I should use the stamped paper or not? You see," she added to Bernard, "if we refuse the address it is tantamount to admitting Violet Dean's identity with her wife."

Maxwell thought a moment.

"I don't think anyone at the theatre knows Miss Dean's address except St. John and the stage manager. We had better put as many obstacles in Lord Ashdale's way as possible. If he really is afraid of publicity he won't make direct inquiries, and the lack of the address will keep him at bay a little. I have been trying to think of a lawyer we could trust; but I don't know much of the fraternity. A struggling author can't afford the luxury of going to law."

"David's cousin, Joseph Ward, is a lawyer," said Mrs. Nairn, "and I would trust him through thick and thin. I will get David to go to his private house to-night and invoke his aid; then if you don't post the note to Lord Ashdale till late he will be prepared before the Earl can call on him."

And the letter, which bore the date October 10th but no address, ran thus:—

"Miss Violet Dean, of the Frivolity Theatre, declines to accord Lord Ashdale an interview, or to hold any personal communication with him whatever. If he attempts to molest her she will place the matter in the hands of her solicitor, Mr. Joseph Ward, of Mulberry Court, Inner Temple."

When David Nairn came home and heard what had happened he at once endorsed his wife's verdict that Violet Dean must remain beneath the shelter of their roof; but one part of Helen's arrangements he reversed: he said that Bernard Maxwell was not the right person to see the beautiful young actress home from the theatre.

"My dear Nell," he said gently, "Bernard is head over ears in love with her; can't you see that the more they are together the greater his

pain must be? It may sound hard-hearted, but to my mind the best thing Maxwell could do would be to start for America."

"David!"

"Dear little woman," he explained, "what is the use of drawing out the agony? While that scoundrel Ashdale lives Bernard and that poor child upstairs can't marry."

"No, but Bernard is her friend. Why should he leave her now she is in such trouble?"

"Because there is an unwritten law in society that a man may not see too much of a woman whom he loves. If he is unable to marry her, and, depend upon it, Neil, though society's laws may seem a trifling hard, there's nothing but misery for those who break them."

Helen began to think practically who could supply Bernard's place, and was relieved to remember a middle-aged seamstress of the highest respectability who was greatly in want of work; there was little doubt that for a trifling weekly Miss Kemp would thankfully accompany Violet to the theatre, sit in the dressing-room with some fine sewing (when she was lucky enough to have any) during the play, and drive back with Miss Dean when it was over. As Mary Kemp lived in a narrow street at the back of the Nairns there could be no difficulty about the cab taking her home, and being almost stone deaf, if by any evil chance Lord Ashdale discovered the arrangement and tried to enlist her on his side in any scheme he might make to get possession of his wife, she would not be a ready assistant.

Mrs. Nairn made the bargain at once, wrote a little note to Bernard telling him what she had done, "as her husband thought under the peculiar circumstances it was desirable Miss Dean should not have a masculine escort," and then when Violet and Miss Kemp had started Helen sat down fairly tired out with excitement, while her husband set out to interview his cousin who lived, unfortunately, on the Surrey side of the water.

Mr. Ward listened with ready interest, but his verdict was not reassuring.

"Lord Ashdale could not compel his wife to live with him against her will save the celebrated Jackson case (then comparatively recent), but unless there was a legal separation he could call at any house where she happened to be and demand to see her, and if he employed any reasonable force in getting admission to the said house it would not constitute a legal trespass."

Mr. Ward's advice was that Lord Ashdale and his wife should meet—if necessary in the presence of a third party—and try to arrange a legal separation on amicable terms; until this was done he feared much annoyance and vexation lay before the young Countess.

"And can't the marriage be annulled?"

"Only on the usual grounds."

"I don't understand."

"I mean that Lady Ashdale's marriage can not be annulled, but it can be dissolved on either party giving the other due and complete grounds to sue for a divorce."

David Nairn groaned.

"And that is all the comfort you can give her,—if she loses her honour she may hope for her freedom!"

"And even then it would be doubtful," said the lawyer. "I have heard something of the Earl, and I know he is an obstinate customer. If he believed his wife wanted her freedom, in order to marry someone else, it is as likely as not he would not try for a divorce."

"Well, there must be something very wrong in the marriage laws," said David Nairn, conclusively, and probably a good many people would agree with him.

CHAPTER XX.

THE play of *Broken Utters* was running a brilliant course with the new actress, Violet Dean in the leading rôle. As yet Lord Ashdale was playing a waiting game, and had not shown his hand; he had taken not the least notice of "Miss Dean's" letter; had not called on Mr. Ward or even written to him; indeed, one would

almost have said that he had accepted his defeat, and been convinced either that Miss Dean was not his wife, or else that no inducement would lure his bride back to his side. The Nairns and their poor little friend would have been lulled into complete security but for one rather significant fact. Lord Ashdale engaged the same box he had had on the first performance of *Broken Fingers* nightly; sometimes he sat there alone or with a companion; sometimes the box was empty, but it was always taken and paid for.

Mrs. Nairn grew nervous about it, and wanted to know if it would be of any use to "speak to Mr. St. John," but her husband laughed at the idea.

"You can't expect St. John to forego fifteen guineas a week for a romantic scruple," he told her. "Besides, a certain number of seats, boxes, stalls, and so on, are always taken through the libraries, and if Lord Ashdale were refused 'Box E,' at the *Frivolity* ticket office (I very much doubt if he could be), there would be nothing to prevent his booking another elsewhere. If he chooses to pay fifteen guineas a week for the pleasure of gazing at the girl he believes to be his wife, we can't stop him."

"And it does not seem to make her nervous," remarked Helen. "Mr. St. John says her acting improves every night."

"Yes, she has found her rightful niche. It's a thousand pities Ashdale can't fall off his horse, and get himself smashed up in the hunting-field. Miss Dean and Maxwell would make an ideal couple."

Helen sighed.

"I begin to think you were right, David, when you said it would be better for Bernard to go away. He looks awfully pale and thin, and his nerves are so upset the least thing seems to irritate him. He was happier far when he was a struggling writer of 'pot-boilers,' and earning a pound a week by reading other people's manuscripts."

"I believe he was," said Nairn, sadly; "and the worst part of it is I don't see how things are going to end. *Broken Fingers* must be taken off on the 20th of December because of the preparations for the pantomime, otherwise I believe it would run well into the summer. St. John means to revise it early in February, and I don't think the six weeks' rest will do Violet Dean any harm; but I wish, with all my heart, Maxwell would take himself off. I know he has two orders for new plays; but surely he could write them just as well abroad. Why doesn't he run over to Paris for a bit? He used to yearn after change of scene when he had hard work to pay his way in Bloomsbury; and now that he is coining money, he doesn't seem as though any inducement would get him to stir from his third-floor at Mrs. Burns."

"I suppose," said Helen, thoughtfully, "it would be rather dull for him to go alone. I wonder if Lady Melton would spare Leonard to accompany him. She has been most gracious to Bernard since his success was in everybody's mouth. He has a card for all her evening parties, and she has asked him to dinner twice."

"I fancy she begins to find out that she has made a mistake, and her protégé, Leonard, is a born idler. I daresay she would spare him, but I doubt Bernard caring for his company. I have never heard the particulars, but I am quite sure the two have quarrelled."

"I have not seen Leonard for ages; I mean, literally, seen him. Of course, since he has lived with Lady Melton he has been much too grand to come here, but at first I used to see him about."

"I'm afraid he's on the downward path," said David, gravely. "I met a man he used to work for—a picture-dealer—who has given him several commissions to 'copy' portraits, and he told me he didn't believe Leonard Maxwell had earned a fiver since he went to Cadogan Place, and that the last time he saw him—quite lately too—he came into the shop and asked if there wasn't any job for him; and his hand shook so, and he looked so altogether out of condition, that Franks wouldn't have given him a commission if he had had any."

It was quite true. When a man begins the

downward path his course is generally swift. Lady Melton meant kindly when she made her generous offer to her great nephew, but Leonard set the seal on all his chance of fame when he accepted it.

There are some natures which can only do good work when spurred on by real need. In the old Bloomsbury days one or two art critics had had great hopes of Leonard Maxwell, and the little picture in the Academy, which introduced him to Lady Melton's notice, was really a gem of its kind. But even then he did not work regularly. He often kept the picture-dealers (Franks and others of that ilk) waiting for their commissions till their patience was at its last gasp. When his purse was literally empty, or when there was some particular thing he coveted which could only be obtained by ready money, he would paint for hours at a stretch, hardly leaving off to take food, and toiling at his easel till he was almost exhausted. But his purse replenished, or the object of his fancy acquired, he indulged in another spell of idleness.

So when he found himself provided with a luxurious home, where there were pleasant engagements to fill up his time, it was hardly surprising, perhaps, that his idleness gained complete mastery over him, and he put off the necessity for work indefinitely. Even when he grew pressed for ready money, he believed he had only to drop a hint to his adoring aunt, and it would be forthcoming. He delayed dropping the hint because, with all his faults, he had some gentlemanly instincts, and he hated to ask a woman for money. When creditors began to press for payment, he made a skilful remark to Lady Melton about "the expenses of his position," and she at once offered him on allowance, writing a cheque for the first quarter on the spot.

But only for £10. That was the greatest blow to Leonard. Up till then he had believed he had only to ask to have. He believed, once aroused to the fact he could not get on without ready money, his aunt would fix his allowance at two or three (he preferred the latter figure) hundred a-year. He forgot that Lady Melton firmly believed the hours he passed away from her were spent in painting and that she, therefore, concluded he was earning something.

He might have pulled himself up even then. Two courses were open to him, either of which would arrested his progress to ruin. He might have gone to Lady Melton and told her frankly he had not sold a picture since he came to live with her; that he had foolishly amassed debts on the hope of a good sum for the masterpiece not even begun, but that if she would pay these he proposed to turn over a new leaf and henceforth devote himself entirely to art for a fixed number of hours a day. Or the braver course still would have been to confess to her that art and fashionable pleasures could not go hand in hand, and that if he wanted to win fame he must go back to the humble surroundings of his earlier years. Would she, of her kindness advance the money to pay the debts which had accumulated during his brief career as a man of fashion, and he would regard the sum as a debt to be repaid by regular instalments out of his earnings?

But a certain amount of humiliation and shame must have been his portion in either of these courses, and so he preferred to drift on in his present life, even though he knew the end must be ruin.

After his quarrel with Bernard, on his cousin's refusing to "lend his name," Leonard plotted his old friend's disappointment with consummate cunning, and he was furious when he found that he had failed and *Broken Fingers* was the success of that autumn; but when he met Bernard afterwards, and the latter greeted him cordially, he saw no reason why he should not profit by his cousin's generosity.

Lady Melton had a passion for celebrities, either actual or embryo, and as there could be no doubt of Bernard's fame, she despatched Leonard to invite him warmly to Cadogan Place. At the same time the false friend managed to congratulate Bernard with very good grace, and the generous-hearted author, who would have shared his last crust with anyone he loved, not only "made it up" with his cousin, but presented a gift

of twenty pounds on the latter as a share of his "first fruits."

And Leonard took it!

He took it without the least hesitation, looking on it, indeed, as his just due, since Bernard was to enter fashionable society under his auspices, and he had managed to persuade himself his aunt's invitation was due to his own suggestion.

Bernard's motive for accepting Lady Melton's invitation was this: he knew that she was Lord Ashdale's aunt, and though she professed to be at variance with him she was yet his only feminine relation.

If only Bernard could find out that she was a true kind-hearted woman she would be the best friend in all the world for the poor young girl who, to her sorrow, was Lord Ashdale's wife.

Bernard went to Cadogan Place with only that end in view: to study Lady Melton and see if she might be trusted with the true history of the girl who as "Gertrude LeStrange" nightly delighted crowded houses at the *Frivolity*.

But unfortunately for Bernard's plan a reaction had set in the old lady's mind in Lord Ashdale's favour. She was already beginning to realize that she had been mistaken in Leonard. Still fond of him as an agreeable young relative, she was very nearly disillusionised as to his genius. Instead of seeing in him the rightful heir of the Ashdale property, cruelly cut out of his inheritance by his uncle's marriage, she began to think that after all it was natural that Lord Ashdale should desire a son of his own, and that as he was not an old man Leonard had had no right to count on being his heir.

While in this mood the Earl called on her and made himself most fascinating. He regretted that delicate health prevented his young wife from joining him in London at present. When she was stronger his aunt would be the first person to whom he should hope to present her.

Of course he was supposed to have made a romantic marriage by choosing a bride in her teens, but by birth and descent Veronica was fully his equal. Her father had been the second son of Sir Horace Leigh, the holder of one of the oldest baronetcies in England. Her grandmother was a duke's daughter. In a very few weeks he hoped to introduce Veronica to his aunt and then he was sure her beauty would be his best excuse.

Lady Melton went over to the enemy heart and soul. In one interview Lord Ashdale had conquered all her prejudices, so that when Bernard Maxwell came to her house, and the conversation turned (naturally) on his cousin's chances of being his uncle's heir the old lady said frankly,—

"I hope Leonard will make a name for himself. My nephew is still a comparatively young man, and Lady Ashdale is barely twenty, so that there seems every hope we may yet welcome a Viscount Dane. It is a very old passage, and I should be sorry for it to become extinct."

"I believe Lord Ashdale is in London," Bernard observed.

"Yes, he was here last week. A most charming man. I used to be rather prejudiced against him, Mr. Maxwell. My husband thought Ashdale was rather fast, but I think Lord Melton must have been misinformed, and at any rate my nephew must have sown his wild oats by now. He is really a relative to be proud of. I only hope his wife knows what an enviable woman she is."

Bernard bit his lips to keep back the passionate contradiction that rose to them. "Of what use to speak?" Lady Melton was evidently completely infatuated. Well, at any rate, it was a good thing she had shown him her opinions so fully before he had dropped even a hint of Violet Dean's story.

After that Bernard was very slow in accepting her ladyship's invitations. He went to the house occasionally for Leonard's sake. But that was all. He was anxious about his cousin, the young fellow looked like one with whom things were going wrong.

And they were indeed. Leonard Maxwell had committed a crime of which the punishment was penal servitude. Any day he might be arrested

for forgery, and this prospect was not a pleasant one to contemplate.

When Bernard refused to endorse the bill he was anxious to discount, Leonard hit on a dangerous expedient. He knew that fashionable ladies in these days are not exempt from the toils of debt, and it occurred to him to represent to a well-known money lender that Lady Melton herself was in urgent need of ready money until her January dividends came in, and that not liking to call herself, she had instructed him to consult Mr. Solomon on the matter.

The money lender demurred, but when he received a letter purporting to come from Lady Melton, he began to think it was all right, and finally he agreed to advance one hundred and fifty pounds to Mr. Leonard Maxwell on receiving a promissory note for two hundred, payable three months after date, and signed by that gentleman himself, and "backed" by Lady Melton.

Leonard had been initiated into the mysteries of baccarat by his fashionable acquaintance, and had even won a few trifling sums (odd that the beginner at games of chance almost invariably does win), quite enough to encourage him in the belief that by risking a third of Solomon's advance he should gain enough to meet the note when it became due.

And he lost every penny of the fifty pounds. He risked another twenty and lost that. He was literally at his last gasp for money, and on the eighth of January he would have to pay the money lender two hundred pounds or face a criminal prosecution.

Even if his aunt, to spare herself the disgrace of having her own kinsman convicted of forgery, acknowledged the signature as her own, what had he to hope for? She would certainly send him about his business. Away would go his luxurious home, his fashionable society, his ample leisure. He would find himself cast on the world, without a friend or a shilling in his pocket. He dared not confide in Bernard, he simply dared not. He knew his cousin's character too well. Bernard would have shared his last crust with him, but he would have no hand in any practice that savoured of dishonesty, gambling, or even raising money from a professional usurer. Bernard had already lent or rather given him forty pounds since October. It was impossible, simply impossible, that he could find one hundred in little more than a fortnight.

There was not a creature among Leonard's new "set" who would stir a finger to help him. He went the round of the picture dealers to see if he could get a few commissions, and then obtain an advance on them, for in his extremity the miserable spendthrift thought that if he could pay something on account, Solomon would perhaps consent to "renew." But it was all in vain. His idle habits had begun to be too well known, now that he was willing to work he could obtain no employment. He was moody and irritable in those December days, and Lady Melton, who dearly liked to be amused, told him he was bad company. Leonard wondered what she would say if he knew all. He tried to study his great aunt's character, and discover her opinion of the crime of forgery, and whether she did not think it the duty of kinsfolk to stand by each other under all circumstances, but Lady Melton was not fond of discussing imaginary cases, and he gained no enlightenment.

"I think I shall go and spend Christmas with my husband's cousin, the present Lord Melton," she said, one day, "I had a most pressing invitation from his wife this morning. She included you, of course, Leonard; but I doubt if you would find it congenial. Lord Melton is devoted to a country life, and spends most of his time pottering over the estate and counting his cabbages or whatever else happens to be growing, and his wife has no ideas beyond soup kitchens and charity blankets, prosperity is quite thrown away upon those two. If only I had had a son and they had remained plain Mr. and Mrs. Melton, with seven hundred a year and a few acres of land, I believe they would have been much happier."

"Of course, I will go to Yorkshire if you wish it, aunt," the young man said, dutifully;

"but I own the prospect does not sound alluring."

"I don't wish it," she said, practically. "I believe you would be wretched, and I am sure you are not the sort of young man the Meltons would approve of. When once I give out that I am going into Yorkshire alone, you will have a dozen invitations to dinner on Christmas Day, or, of course, you can have any one you like here."

Leonard thought a moment. He saw no clear prospect of gaining two hundred pounds in London, or even a sufficient portion of it as to stop the mouth of the rapacious Solomon; but still, in a remote Yorkshire village the task would be simply impossible, and the description his aunt gave of her relations by marriage did not make him anxious to enjoy their hospitality.

"I think I will stay in town if you are quite sure you do not mind taking the long journey alone."

"My dear boy, I have my maid, and what do you suppose I did before you took up your abode in Cadogan Place?"

Leonard felt snubbed. Clearly he was not so indispensable to her as he had imagined.

"How long shall you stay?" he inquired.

"Only till after New Year's Day. I am engaged to party on the 4th of January."

Then she would be back before the fatal promissory note fell due. Leonard hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry.

Lady Melton elected to travel on the eighteenth of December, so as to reach her cousin's before the crush of Christmas travelling began. In point of fact, the fashionable widow ought to have been known as the Dowager Lady Melton, and she was so described in all correct journals; but the wife of the reigning Baron had been seen so little in London, and was such a nonentity compared to her brilliant relative, that most of the widow's friends forgot there was any Lady Melton but herself.

Leonard drove to King's-cross to see his aunt off, as in duty bound. He was singularly silent on the journey. He was not naturally heartless, but the idea would come into his head that the easiest way out of his difficulties would be, if Providence, in the shape of a railway accident, or a cold brought on by Yorkshire winds, was pleased to remove Lady Melton from this lower world. She was a very independent person, and rarely employed a lawyer. Leonard doubted if anybody would be able to affirm—much less to prove—that she had not been a party to the transaction with Solomon. If his aunt died her executors would have to pay the two hundred pounds; or if they insisted on Leonard sharing the obligation, why, the legacy she so often referred to would enable him to do as. It was an awful thought to desire the death of one who had never shown him anything but kindness. Leonard felt ashamed of himself, and yet Portland Prison loomed before him so clearly in his dreams. He was in such a desperate plight that, like a drowning man, he was ready to catch at a straw. Strangely enough, Lady Melton herself alluded to her death.

"Men make strange wills," she said, suddenly, when they were nearly at the terminus. "My husband worshipped the ground I trod on, while he did not care twopence for his cousin; but just because Melton was his own flesh and blood, he left my fortune to go to him when I died. He might just as well have let me have the disposing of it myself. Why, I may outlive Melton; he's only a year or two younger than I am."

"And then I suppose you would have the power to dispose of it?"

"No, I shouldn't. Whenever I die my income reverts to the reigning Lord Melton. I can't make a rich man of you, Leonard, even, if I live to be a hundred."

Leonard went back to Cadogan-place in the worst of spirits. He had a long day before him, for in view of Lady Melton's journey they had breakfasted early. He had no idea how he should get through the many hours that must elapse before bed-time, and when the servant who admitted him presented him with a letter which had come by hand, he received it with

more attention than he often bestowed on his correspondence.

The letter was very short, but it sent the blood dancing through his veins.

"If Leonard Maxwell would like to earn a large sum of money easily, swiftly, and secretly, he will call at the Hotel Métropole, and ask for the Earl of Ashdale."

(To be continued.)

POOR LITTLE COLUMBINE.

—20—

(Continued from page 224.)

For the first time since he left the road he pauses.

Standing his gun against a tree, he lifts his straw hat and mops his flushed face with his pocket-handkerchief.

In that kindly face and those cheery, brown eyes we recognise Mortimer Lytton.

Throwing his hat on the turf, he looked round for some sign of human life or habitation, but trees and rocks, and a wild undergrowth of gorse, were the only objects to be seen.

He listened. The summer's noonday hum of distant voices came with a sleepy murmur on the perfumed air. The sharpening of hooks, and the distant song of the reaper came from far-off cornfields, blending with the tinkle of sheep bells on the brown hillsides.

Putting his fingers to his lips, he gave vent to a loud, shrill whistle, then listened. No answer came back save the loud hum of insect life, the soft rustle of the leafage, the chirp of the robin, or the lazy notes of the sleepy thrush.

After a short interval he repeats the whistle, and with better success. Other sounds blend with the robin's chirp and the thrush's sweet song.

He heard the loud barking of a dog and a girl's fresh, young voice mingle with the trill of the soft bird music.

Mortimer Lytton strained his eyes and ears, and tried to go in the direction from whence the voice came. He pushed on, though he made little progress through the gorse and bramble.

Again he stops, and sends forth that wild, shrill whistle, making distant echoes, and then a girl's voice called out,

"Who are you? What do you want? Have you lost your way?"

He looked round in surprise; then glancing upwards, saw a flutter of scarlet ribbons on the top of the grassy steep he was climbing.

"Yes, I have lost my way. I have wandered from the high road."

"Are you staying in the neighbourhood?"

"Yes, I am."

"Where are you staying?"

"At Mr. Archer's."

"Oh! I know."

"They will think some accident has befallen me."

"If you will climb up here, I'll show you the way. I know Mr. Archer, and so does papa."

Mortimer commenced breasting the hill as fast as the tangled gorse would permit him.

On the level above him stood a young girl in a brown holland dress, with scarlet sash and bows.

A lovely girl on the verge of womanhood, tall and graceful, with a cloud of loose, golden hair that reached below her waist. She carried her garden hat on her arm, filled with poppies and daisies; a large white-and-tan spaniel, with a lolling, red tongue, was stretched on the turf at her feet.

As she watches the ascent of her new acquaintance she swings from a young sapling, that bends with her slight weight.

There is inimitable grace in her attitude, and in the pose of her golden head.

Mortimer Lytton glanced upwards as he neared the level. The girl's fair face was bending over him, but instead of expressing admiration

tion, his face is the picture of horror. He started violently, uttering an ejaculation of surprise and terror.

"What is the matter? You look frightened! Why do you stare so? Are you afraid of Sailor? Down, sir; naughty dog!"

The dog had started to his feet, and was barking loudly at Mortimer Lytton.

"I beg your pardon, young lady. You think me very rude indeed; but when I looked at you I was quite startled. I thought the dead had come to life again!"

"Indeed. Am I so pale? Mamma told me this morning that I looked more like a dairy-maid than a young lady."

And a peal of silvery laughter rang out, and was echoed far away among the rocks.

Mortimer Lytton looked very sheepish before this outburst. But two or three strides more, and he stood beside her on the level sward.

"You so much resemble a young lady I knew who died two years ago, but now I come to observe you closer, there is a difference. You could not possibly be my young friend, but you would pass for her younger sister. You are at least four years younger than she would be now were she alive; your hair is a brighter gold, your eyes are a darker brown; you are taller and slighter, but it is very hard to say which would carry off the palm for beauty!" he said, with a light laugh.

"Indeed! I should like to have seen that young lady. Are you an artist?" she asked, archly, and with a laugh that recalls so vividly the beautiful mouth and teeth of the young columbine.

"I am not an artist," he says, in reply to her question. "I love art, and am a collector. I buy up all the rare bits I can get."

"How nice! How I should like to see your collection. But you are now on the Sussex Downs. You have lost yourself, and I am going to set you right. You will have to show me your collection some day for this. You see where those red-brick chimneys rise above the tree-tops! That is our house. It is called Chesney Place. You have not told me your name; mine is Mabel Chesney."

"Chesney—Chesney! I have heard that name before!" he exclaimed, stopping suddenly, and gazing at her with a puzzled expression.

"That's very likely; papa is so well-known about here, you know."

"What is your papa's name?"

"Sir John Chesney, of Chesney Place, Sussex," the girl answered, with a naive smile.

"And Chesney was the young lady's name who was so like you, and who died two years ago."

CHAPTER XL

It was the girl's turn to be startled now. "Her name was Chesney!" she says, opening her brown eyes very wide. "How very odd that she should be so like me, and bear the same name! You say she was four years older than I. So would my elder sister be if she were alive. Come along, mamma will wonder where I have got to. I must tell her about this Miss Chesney who was so like to me. It will grieve mamma; she is always grieving for my sister Flora, who was drowned when a baby."

Mortimer Lytton turned a startled look upon his companion that she did not see.

"Are you taking me to your mamma, Miss Chesney?" he asked.

"Yes; if she is downstairs; but mamma may be with my aunt who has just returned from Florence, and is very ill. Dr. Clarkson says she cannot live, and papa has telegraphed for my uncle. But you will be sure to see papa."

A bend in the meadow path they had been traversing brought them in sight of a large, many-gabled, red-brick building, surrounded by lawns and gardens.

"You haven't told me your name yet, Mr.——"

"Lytton. My name is Lytton."

"Well, Mr. Lytton, you see that gate? If it

is padlocked you will have to climb it. Here goes."

And without waiting to see if the gate was locked, Miss Mabel Chesney ran at it, and in the most unadulterated manner flung herself over with the agility of an athlete.

"Now, Sailor," she calls from the other side, and as the dog follows her over the gate her merry laugh rang out.

"There, Mr. Lytton, can you do that?" she said as she gathered the scattered flowers from her hat.

"With your permission I would rather go through the gate; it is not locked," he answered, in a subdued tone, for he had been very grave since Mabel Chesney told him about her sister that was drowned in her infancy.

He pushed the gate open, and found himself in a gravel walk winding through a shrubbery, where scarlet roses glowed like spots of fire in the July sunshine. The walk led out on the lawn through the centre of which a broad carriage drive led from the lodge to the principal entrance.

"There's papa, sitting under that chestnut!" exclaimed Miss Chesney, "and here's a fly from the station. I wonder who's in it? Ah! perhaps it is auntie's new nurse from London."

And Mabel skipped towards the garden-chair under the chestnut, where a gentleman was seated reading a newspaper.

He was a tall, robust, handsome man, with a bright, clear complexion, and fine blue eyes. His hair, once a bright golden, was now thickly mixed with grey. His coat, thrown open in front, displayed the immaculate linen and white waistcoat that covered his ample bosom.

"See, papa!" cried Mabel, running forward, cheeks and eyes aglow, and hair tossing on the light breeze. "See, I've brought you another stray sheep. This gentleman has lost his way. He has come from Grasmere."

"You are welcome to Chesney, sir. You are staying at Mr. Archer's," says the Sussex baron advancing toward Lytton.

"Yes; I am on a short visit to Mr. Archer. My name is Lytton—Mortimer Lytton. I had lost my way and had been wandering about half-an-hour without regaining the high road, when this young lady came to my assistance."

"Ah! My little girl usually brings one or two wanderers here in the week; 'her stray sheep' she calls them. Well, Mr. Lytton, it is three miles to Mr. Archer's, and as it is getting late, and you must be hungry, if you will do me the honour of dining with us I'll drive you over to Grasmere in the evening."

"Thank you very much, my dear sir, but I cannot stay. They will be anxious about me."

"Oh, papa! Mr. Lytton has known a young lady who resembled me very much, and her name was Chesney!"

"You don't say so! By Jove! Mr. Lytton is this true! I did you really know a young lady of the name of Chesney?"

"Yee, Sir John; two years ago I became acquainted with a young lady of that name. She was an actress, and her professional name was Mademoiselle Olymp. In private life and to her friends she was Miss Flossie Lorrimer——"

"Lorrimer!" Sir John started to his feet, taking the big cigar out of his mouth. A grey pallor spread over his face, his lips were bloodless, and he shivered as though he were icy cold. "Come into the house, Mr. Lytton, and tell what you know about this person, this young lady you know as Flossie Lorrimer. Mab, go tell mamma I wish to see her in the library; she is with Aunt Marion. Now, Mr. Lytton, the child is gone, come in the library and tell me what you know."

"The young lady I knew is dead, Sir John. She died a violent death, poor child! It will be three years next pantomime season since she was foully murdered, just as she reached home, after playing columbine at the Frivolity.

"Dead! Murdered! And has the murderer been found and brought to justice?" demanded Sir John, as he paused at a door at the end of the hall, and held it open for his chance visitor to pass in.

The latter found himself in a spacious library, where a tall, stained window cast strange lights

and shadows and quaint reflections on the polished floor, whereon several costly skins were spread.

"Be seated, Mr. Lytton," said the Sussex Baronet, pushing a heavy morocco chair towards his guest.

"The murderer of Miss Lorrimer was never brought to justice, although a very large reward was offered for the murderer's apprehension."

"But did you know the lady's parents?"

"No, I understood that they had been drowned. She never knew them."

"Was her real name Chesney?"

"So the woman who brought her up stated."

"The woman who brought her up?"

"Yes. Everybody thought she was the girl's mother, but she told the truth after the murder. I was present when she confided the affair to a friend of mine. She was urged to do so by fear, but my friend and I have kept the secret. They were wrecked in a fog when crossing from Calais to Dover; her master and mistress, their infant daughter and herself. She, with the baby, was lowered into a boat, but the parents were accidentally prevented from following, and she believes they perished. Mrs. Lorrimer is still living."

"Ah, here is Lady Chesney! I am glad you are come. How pale you are looking! Is Marion worse?"

"No. But what is this Mabel has been telling me about a young lady bearing the name of Florence Chesney?" says the lady, very much agitated.

"My dear, this gentleman tells me that Ellen Lorrimer is alive," Sir John said, gently.

"Oh! But the young girl you knew, what about her?" she cried, clasping her white hands.

"My dear Margaret, the young girl this gentleman knew is dead."

"And her name was——"

"Florence Chesney."

"Dead, dead!" cried the lady. "Well, it is better so. She is better dead than knowing and loving another woman as her mother."

"But my dear Margaret, we do not know that this girl was our Florence," said the Baronet, in a tone of appeal.

"Did you know Ellen Lorrimer?" she asked, turning to Mortimer Lytton.

"Oh yes, madam; but I don't know where she is now."

"I must find Ellen Lorrimer. You will help me to find her, will you not? Dear me! Mabel, whatever is the matter?" this as her daughter entered the room hurriedly.

"Oh! mamma, do come! Aunt Marion is so bad. Her new nurse is with her, but she is coughing so dreadfully."

"Dear me!" said Sir John. "I have just telegraphed to St. Petersburg for her husband. She may die before Townley reaches England."

"What did you say, Sir John? Townley—Marion! Are you speaking of Mr. and Mrs. Dorner Townley?"

"Yes. Do you know them?"

"He is my oldest and dearest friend."

"Mrs. Townley is Lady Chesney's half-sister," observes the Baronet.

"Oh, indeed! That's another surprise; but I did not know any member of her family except herself. I would like to see Mrs. Townley. What is her complaint?"

"I fear, consumption. She has been pining away during the last two years. Townley has been travelling all the time, and Marion has been living in Florence since her father's death. She arrived here a week ago, and we sent to London for Sir William Clarkson. He says she cannot last long; she suffers from heart disease, and may die suddenly from fright or excitement. Poor Marion, she is one of the richest women in England, and one of the most unhappy."

As he finished speaking Mabel entered, flushed and excited.

"Oh! papa, please send for Dr. Walker. Shall I tell James to saddle Red Bess, and ride over? And will you please go to mamma in aunt's bedroom?"

"Is your aunt no better?"

"No, papa—worse."

"Tell James to saddle the mare, and go at once; and tell him to call at Grasmere on his

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way home, and leave word that Mr. Lytton is here. You will excuse me, Mr. Lytton; I shall come back as soon as possible. Mabel will come and keep you company after she sees James."

"If possible, Sir John, will you let Mrs. Townley know that I am here?"

"Yes, I will, Mr. Lytton," answered Sir John, as he went out, closing the door behind him.

CHAPTER XII.

Ten minutes later, as Mortimer Lytton stood admiring a bust of Byron, Sir John Chesney returned to the library.

"Come upstairs, please, Mr. Lytton. My wife wishes to ask you a few questions, but she cannot leave her sister. You'll see if Mrs. Townley will recognize you."

Mortimer Lytton followed Sir John from the library across the spacious hall, and up the broad staircase along a corridor, and knocked at a door, which was opened by a maid-servant. The Baronet led the way through two luxuriously-furnished rooms, and, pausing at the door of a third, tapped gently.

It was promptly opened by Lady Chesney herself.

"Ah, Mr. Lytton; I told my sister that you were here, and as soon as she heard your name she fainted."

"Indeed! We were very good friends."

Your name conjured up unpleasant memories, perhaps. She was very fond of Townley, but your friend, Mr. Lytton, did not behave well to her. Look at her now, and, see if you can recognise the Marion Townley of two years ago!"

Mortimer approached the couch on which lay the inanimate form of a woman, with closed eyes and deathly white face, and a quantity of pale yellow hair.

"Is that Mrs. Dorner Townley? Good Heaven! she looks more than forty years old!" he exclaimed in surprise.

"Poor Marion! she has been always ailing," said Sir John.

"Poor lady! I am sorry!" murmured Lytton, as he gazed on the poor, deserted, neglected wife.

"I often think that Marion suffers from some mental trouble that baffles medical skill," said her ladyship. "There!—she is opening her eyes. I wonder if she will know you. Marion, dear, are you better? Do you know Mr. Lytton, dear?"

"Mr. Mortimer Lytton? Yes."

Her pale face flushed painfully as she held out one thin white hand to her husband's friend. Mortimer took her thin hand in his, and raised it to his lips reverentially. Her maid Mabel raised her to a sitting posture, and supported her so.

She raised her pale blue eyes to his face.

"I have not seen him once since that awful night!" she moaned. "But you will see him some day. Oh, will you tell him—ah! I cannot tell him what will make him curse me in my grave. Ah! that face, and—"

She opened her eyes in a wide stare at some one or something behind Mortimer. He turned, and stood face to face with Mrs. Lorrimer.

His amusement was so great that he uttered a loud cry, and staggered back.

"How do you do, Mr. Lytton?" she said, extending her thin hand to him.

"Mrs. Lorrimer! Is it possible?"

"You are surprised to see me, Mr. Lytton?"

"How is it you are here, Mrs. Lorrimer?" he asked, excitedly.

"The lady I lived with died, and, being out of a situation, Dr. Clarkson sent me here as nurse to Lady Chesney's sister, Mrs. Dorner Townley."

"Then you know Mrs. Townley?"

"Oh, yes! I know her."

"Why, it was the sight of you that terrified her just now."

"Yes, Mr. Lytton. When Mrs. Townley first caught sight of me an hour ago she caught sight of this ring, and fainted right off. When

she saw me enter the room just now she had another turn," said Mrs. Lorrimer, with a peculiar smile, as she held up her right hand; and Mortimer Lytton saw over her black kid glove the same ring she showed him nearly two years before.

There it was, with its sinister ruby cross and flashing diamonds.

"And why should the sight of that ring agitate Mrs. Townley?"

"Because the ring is hers!"

"Just the reason why she should be glad to see it. You will have to restore it, of course!"

"Shall I tell you where I found this ring?"

"Oh! no—no—no! Mr. Lytton, for my husband's sake, do not hear her! She is mad—she is mad!"

It was Mrs. Townley who spoke, or rather shrieked, as she started up in a sitting posture on the couch, all her long fair hair falling loose over her shoulders.

"What on earth does it all mean!" exclaimed Mortimer, in accents of deep distress.

"Why, it is Ellen Lorrimer!" cried Lady Chesney, wildly. "Speak, woman! Are you not my old servant, Ellen Lorrimer, who I thought had been drowned with my baby nineteen years ago? Speak—is it not so?" and her ladyship shook the woman so violently as to nearly throw her down.

"Yes—oh! yes, Miss Margaret—I mean, Lady Chesney. I am that most unhappy woman! I—"

"Where is my child?"

"Oh, Lady Chesney! she is dead, and there is her murderer! Your own sister, my lady! Look at her two dainty little hands, those long white fingers that gathered round my darling's throat, and crushed her young life out! I found this diamond ring in the fur round my poor girl's neck!"

Mrs. Townley sprang up in bed, with her hands clasped wildly, and gave utterance to one long, piercing, never-to-be-forgotten shriek, and fell back lifeless!

She never rallied. A blood-vessel was ruptured in her heart, and she died almost immediately.

It is a warm June sunset, three years later. Lady Chesney is entering the fashionable world in her Belgravian mansion.

At an open window looking out on a balcony filled with flowers a lady and gentleman are seated. The lady is very young, and very lovely.

"You are eighteen to-day, sweet Mabel, and I am nearly thirty-five. Let me ask you once again if you think you will ever regret wedding a man so many years your senior?"

"Never, dear Mortimer—never!"

He stooped and kissed the golden curls on her white forehead.

"The one trouble of my life now is to know that Townley is buried in that foreign land. Thank Heaven! he will never know of that awful revelation."

"When we return from our honeymoon, Mortimer, you must take me to the Frivolity, where my sister played columbine; and though my sister is now in the family vault at Chesney I should like you to take me to Brompton Cemetery to see the spot where they buried Olymp, the victim of A WIFE'S VENGEANCE!"

[THE END.]

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CHAPTER XVI.—(continued.)

"You shall never know loneliness again, dear aunt," murmured Claire. "To make every moment of your life happy will be our only aim."

"Thank you, my dear," replied Miss Harris, tremulously.

"You shall live with us always, if you will, aunt," said Trixy, "and be one of the family. You may have my boudoir all to yourself, and I will take the small spare room next to it."

"You are very good to me," said Miss Harris, huskily.

Mrs. Pomeroy had been busy getting the hand-some guest-chamber ready for their wealthy kinswoman. She entered just in time to overhear Trixy's last remark.

"Miss Harris shall have a larger, handsomer boudoir than yours, Trixy," remarked her mother. "The entire suite of rooms on this floor is at her disposal, if she will only allow us to persuade her to remain with us. My dear daughters, you must add your entreaties on this point to your father's and mine."

"How can I ever repay you for your deep interest in a lone body like me?" murmured Miss Harris.

The eyes of the girls and those of their mother met; but they did not dare express in words the thought that had leaped simultaneously into their minds at her words.

"You have had no one to look after your wardrobe, dear Aunt Harris," said Mrs. Pomeroy; "so do, I beseech you, accept some of my gowns until you desire to lay them aside for fresher ones."

"I am bewildered by so much kindness," faltered Miss Harris. And she was more bewildered still at the array of silks and satins and costly lace with which the three ladies deluged her.

The very finest rooms in the house were given her. Miss Trixy made her a strong punch with her own hands, "just the way she said she liked it," and Claire bathed her face in fragrant cologne, and tried on a lace-night-cap with a great deal of fuss.

Some one came in to turn down the night-lamp a little later on—a quiet, slender figure in a dark brown gown. It was not Mrs. Pomeroy, nor was it either of her daughters.

"Who are you?" asked Miss Harris, perceiving at a glance that she was evidently no servant of the household. A sweet, pale, wan face was turned toward her.

"I am Agnes Pomeroy," replied a still sweeter voice.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Miss Harris, "I never heard that there were three daughters in this family." She could see, even in that dim light, the pink flush steal quickly over the wan, white face.

"I am a daughter by my father's first marriage," she answered, quietly. "My stepmother and her daughters seldom mention me to any one."

There was no suspicion of malice in her tone, only sadness; and without another word, save a gentle good-night, she fled from the room.

It was Trixy, bright, jolly Trixy, who awakened Miss Harris the next morning. Claire insisted upon helping her to dress, while Mr. and Mrs. Pomeroy tapped at the door, and eagerly inquired if she had rested well.

She was given the seat of honour at the breakfast-table, and a huge bouquet of hot-house roses lay at her plate.

Trixy had inquired the night before as to her favourite viands, and they were soon placed before her deliciously prepared.

Claire brought a dainty hassock for her feet, and Mrs. Pomeroy a silken scarf, to protect her from the slightest draught from the open windows.

"You treat me as though I were a queen," said Miss Harris, smiling through her tears.

She could scarcely eat her breakfast, Trixy

and Claire hung about her chair so attentively, ready to anticipate her slightest wish. But looking around, she missed the sweet, winsome face she had seen in her room the night before.

"Are all the family assembled here?" she inquired, wondering if it had not been a dream she had had of a sweet white face and a pair of sad grey eyes.

"All except Agnes," replied Mrs. Pomeroy, with a frown. "She's rather queer, and prefers not to join us at table or in the drawing-room. She spends all her time up in the attic bedroom, reading the Bible and writing Christian stories for children for the religious papers. We don't see her for weeks at a time, and actually forget she lives in this house. She's quite a religious crank, and you won't see much of her."

Miss Harris saw the girls laugh and titter at their mother's remarks; and from that moment they lowered in her estimation, while sweet Agnes was exalted.

CHAPTER XVII.

The next few days that passed were like a dream to Miss Harris. Everyone was so kind and considerate—it seemed that she was living in another world.

"It is Heaven on earth to have loving friends and relatives," she said to herself, happy, grateful tears shining in her eyes.

Mrs. Pomeroy had cautioned the girls against mentioning the fact of Trixy's coming marriage, explaining that she might change her mind about leaving her fortune to the family if she knew there was a prospect of wealth for them from any other source.

"But it would not be fair to let her make sister Trixy her heiress," said Claire, bitterly. "She ought not to get both fortunes. She will come into a magnificent fortune through marrying Philip Desmond. Why should you want her to have Miss Harris's money too? You ought to influence that eccentric old lady to leave her fortune to me."

"Hush! my dear. Miss Harris might hear you," warned her mother.

But the warning had come too late. In coming down the corridor to join the family in the general sitting-room, as they had always insisted on her doing, she had overheard Miss Claire's last remark.

She stopped short, the happy light dying from her eyes, and the colour leaving her cheeks.

"Great Heaven! have I been deceived after all? Was the kindness of the Pomeroy girls and their parents only assumed? Was there a monetary reason back of it all?" she mused.

A great pain shot through her heart; a wave of intense bitterness filled her soul.

She turned and walked slowly back to her own boudoir, and, sitting down by the open window, gave herself up to her now very pleasant contemplations. She had longed for love and companionship as perhaps no other woman in the world had longed for them.

No lover had ever come a wooing her. Her vague dreams of having a husband and children to comfort her old age had slowly vanished as girlhood drifted into womanhood. Youth had slipped from her, and the once brown-hair became streaked with grey, and the noble, comely face was furrowed by Time's ruthless hand.

For some reason best known to Heaven, she had not been intended for a wife and mother, and the poor, lonely creature would have been glad if life had ended for her, despite her wealth, at two-and-forty.

She had believed, somehow, in the love these two young girls had professed for her. She could not imagine that, at their age, they had learned to be mercenary—that their natures were hard and calculating, with no love in their hearts, save what was influenced by the love of almighty gold.

"I will test these girls," muttered Miss Harris, setting her lips together; "and that, too, before another hour passes over my head."

After a few moments more of deliberation she arose, and with a firm step passed slowly down the broad hall to the sitting-room.

Mrs. Pomeroy and her eldest daughter Claire had left the apartment. Trixy alone was there, lounging on a divan, her hair in curl-papers, reading the latest French novel.

On her entering, down went the book, and Trixy sprang up, her face wreathed in smiles.

"I was just wondering if you were lonely or taking a nap," she murmured, sweetly. "Do come right in, Miss Harris, and let me draw the nice easy-chair in the room up to the cool window for you and make you comfortable."

"How considerate you are, my dear child," replied Miss Harris, fairly hating herself for believing this sweet young girl could dissemble. "I am glad to find you alone, Trixy," she continued, dropping into the chair with a weary sigh. "I have been wanting to have a confidential chat with you, my dear, ever since I have been here. Have you the time to spare?"

Trix Pomeroy's blue eyes glittered. Of course Miss Harris wanted to talk to her about leaving her money to her.

"I have as long a time to spare as you wish, dear Miss Harris," she murmured. "A girl friend of mine wrote me that she would call for me to go driving through the Park with her this afternoon, but I shall give it up for the pleasant hour I anticipate spending with you."

"It is not a fair exchange," sighed Miss Harris. "You had better go and take your ride; my story can wait."

"By no means," declared Trixy. "It is pleasing you I am pleasing myself. I assure you."

Miss Harris looked wistfully at the bright young face. Would the tale she had to tell affect the girl's affection for her? She hoped not.

Trix brought a hassock and, placing it at her feet, sat down upon it, and rested her elbows on Miss Harris's chair.

"Now," she said, with a tinkling little laugh that most everyone liked to hear—the laugh that had given her the sobriquet jolly Trixy Pomeroy among her companions—an appellation which had ever since clung to her, "now I am ready to listen to whatever you have to tell me."

After a long pause, which seemed terribly irksome to Trixy, Miss Harris slowly said:

"I think I may as well break right into the subject that is on my mind, and troubling me greatly, without beating around the bush."

"That will certainly be the best way," murmured Trixy.

"Well, then, my dear," said Miss Harris, with harsh abruptness, "I am afraid I am living in this house under false colours."

Trix's blue eyes opened wide. She did not know what to say.

"The truth is, child, I am not the rich woman people credit me with being. I did not tell you that I had lost my entire fortune, and that I was reduced to penury and want—say, I would have been reduced to starvation if you had not so kindly taken me in and done for me."

"What! You have lost your great fortune? You are penniless!" fairly shrieked Trixy, springing to her feet and looking with amazement into the wrinkled face above her.

Miss Harris nodded assent, inwardly asking Heaven to pardon her for this, her first deliberate falsehood.

"And you came here to us, got the best room in our house, and all of mamma's best clothes, and you a beggar!"

Miss Harris fairly trembled under the storm of wrath she had evoked.

"I—did not mention it when I first came, because I had somehow hoped you would care for me for myself, even though my money was gone, dear child."

A sneering, scornful laugh broke from Trixy's lips, a glad hateful to behold flashed from her eyes.

"You have deceived us shamefully!" she cried. "How angry papa and mamma and Claire will be to learn that we have been entertaining a pauper!"

"Perhaps you have been entertaining an angel unaware," murmured Miss Harris.

Trix did not heed her words, but went on excitedly:

"I shall propose to the family to give you

your dismissal in double-quick time, I assure you."

"Does the want of money make so great a difference in me?" faltered Miss Harris.

"I wish you to understand that we don't keep a boarding-house for tramps!" Trixy cried shrilly; adding: "The sooner you take off that fine silk wrapper of mamma's and get into the rage in which you came here, the better it will be for you."

"Trix, little Trixy!" sobbed Miss Harris, "I—I have loved you all your life. I—I had intended making you my heiress. I was always led to believe, from your letters, that you had a great affection for me."

"It was when I thought you were a woman worth millions that I wrote you that!" declared Trixy Pomeroy, with almost brutal candour. "One can afford to toady to a rich woman, especially when there are hopes of her dying soon and leaving one her money; but a poor, dependent woman hanging about is a nuisance not to be tolerated. I may as well take the matter into my own hands and order you out of the house without waiting for the family to return. That will save them doing so."

"But I am old, Trixy," muttered Miss Harris, with a strange look in her eyes. "And see; it has commenced to rain very hard. Surely you will not turn me out into the terrible storm!"

"Won't I!" demanded Trixy. "What business have beggars to be afraid of wind or weather? You'll have to get along like all other beggars."

"Heaven forgive you, girl, for showing so little heart!" exclaimed Miss Harris, rising slowly to her feet.

"I shall take no saucy remarks from you!" cried Trixy, harshly. "Come, make haste! Take off those fine clothes, and be gone as fast as you can!"

"But I have nothing to put on," said Miss Harris.

Trix instantly touched the bell, and when the maid came in response to her summons, she said, quickly—

"Bring me that bundle of clothes mamma laid out for you to give to the charity collector to-day."

Wonderingly the maid brought the bundle, and she wondered still more when Miss Trixy

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ordered her to go down to the servants' hall and not to come up until she was called for.

"Now, then," she cried, harshly, after the door had closed upon the maid, "get into these things at once!"

Miss Harris obeyed; and when at length the change was made, Trixy pointed to the door and cried, shrilly,

"Now go!"

"But the storm!" persisted Miss Harris, pitifully. "Oh, Trixy, at least let me stay until the storm has spent its fury!"

"Not an instant!" cried Trixy Pomeroy, fairly dragging her from the room and down the corridor to the main door, which she flung open, thrust her victim through it, and out into the storm.

CHAPTER XVIII.

If Trixy Pomeroy had taken the trouble to look out after the trembling old woman she had thrust so unceremoniously into the raging storm, she would not have gone up to her own room with such a self-satisfied smile on her face.

Just as that little scene was taking place, a brougham, drawn by a pair of spirited horses, was being driven rapidly down the street, and was almost abreast of the house as this extraordinary little drama was being enacted.

Its occupant had ordered the driver to halt at the Pomeroy's house, and looking out of the window, he had seen with amazement the whole occurrence—had seen Trixy Pomeroy who had always posed before him as a sweet-tempered angel—actually thrust a feeble-looking, poorly-dressed woman out of the house and into the street to face a storm so wild and pitiless that most people would have hesitated before even turning a homeless, wandering cur out into it.

Dr. Desmond's carriage drew up quickly before the curbstone, and as he sprang from the vehicle, his astonishment can better be imagined than described at finding himself face to face with his friend, Miss Harris, and that it was she who had been ejected so summarily. The poor soul almost fainted for joy when she beheld the young physician.

"My dear Miss Harris!" he cried, in amazement, "what in the name of Heaven does the scene I have just witnessed mean?"

"Take me into your carriage, and drive down the street; that is, if you are not in a hurry to make professional call."

Philip Desmond lifted the drenched, trembling woman in his strong arms, placed her in the vehicle, took his seat beside her, and the brougham rolled down the avenue.

Clinging to his strong young arm, Miss Harris told, between her smiles and tears, all that had taken place—of the test which she had put the Pomeroy to before leaving her money to the girl Beatrix who had been named after her; of its disastrous ending when she told Trixy she was poor instead of rich; of the abuse the girl had heaped upon her, which ended by throwing her into the street.

She told all, keeping back nothing. Little dreaming that Philip Desmond knew the Pomeroy, and, least of all, that Trixy was his betrothed.

He listened with darkening brow, his stern lips set, his handsome, jovial, laughing face strangely white.

What could he say to her? He dared not give vent to his bitter thoughts, and denounce the girl he was in honour bound to give his name and shield from all the world's remarks.

"You have learned your lesson, Miss Harris," he said, slowly. "Now be content to return to your own luxurious home and its comforts, a sadder and wiser woman."

"I have not tested all yet," she returned. "There is yet another family, whose address I have recently discovered after the most patient search. I had a cousin by marriage who ran off with a sea-captain. She died, leaving one child,

"THE HUMAN HAIR: Its Restoration and Preservation." A Practical Treatise on Baldness, Greyness, Superfluous Hair, &c. 40 pages. Post-free six stamps from Dr. HORN, Hair Specialist, Bournemouth.

a little daughter. The father no longer follows the sea, but lives at home with the girl, following the trade of basket-making, at which he is quite an expert, I am told, if he would only let drink alone."

Philip Desmond started violently. The colour came and went in his face, his strong hands trembled. He was thankful she did not notice his emotion.

"The man's name is John Davis," she went on, reflectively, "and the girl's is Lois. A strange name for a girl, don't you think so?"

"A beautiful name," he replied, with much feeling; "and I should think the girl who bears it might have all the sweet, womanly graces you look to find in a human being."

Miss Harris gave him the street and number, which he knew but too well, and asked him to drive her within a few doors of the place where she would alight.

When she was so near her destination that she did not have time to ask questions, he said, abruptly,

"I know this family—the old basket-maker and his daughter. I attended him in a recent illness. They seem very worthy, to me, of all confidence. There is a world of difference between this young girl, Lois, and the one you describe as Miss Beatrix Pomeroy. Please don't mention that you know me, Miss Harris, if you would do me a favour," he added, as she alighted.

She did not attach any importance to the words then; but there came a time when she looked back to that hour, and thought of them in a strange and puzzling light.

"It is well to have found this Pomeroy girl in her true colours," Miss Harris muttered to herself as she toiled wearily up the steep and narrow stairway to the Davis's apartments. "Jolly Trixy Pomeroy she used to sign her little letters to me. She ought to have signed them 'Vixen' Trixy Pomeroy. That appellation would have suited her much better. I wonder if this Lois Davis is of the same stamp. If I find that she is, I'll leave my money to some charitable institutions."

The landing was so dark she could hardly discern where the door was on which to knock.

She heard the sound of voices a moment later. This sound guided her, and she was soon tapping at a door which was slightly ajar. She heard someone say from within,—

"Someone is rapping at the door, Lois. Send whoever it is away. The sight of a neighbour's face, or her senseless gossip, would drive me crazy, Lois."

"I shall not invite anyone in if it annoys you, father," answered a sweet, musical voice.

Miss Harris leaned against the door-frame, wondering what the girl was like who had so kindly a voice.

There was the soft *frou-frou* of a woman's skirt, the door was opened, and a tall, slender young girl stood on the threshold, looking inquisitively into the stranger's face.

"I am looking for the home of John Davis and his daughter Lois," said Miss Harris.

"This is John Davis's home, and I am his daughter, Lois," said the young girl, courteously, even though the stranger before her was poorly clad.

"Won't you invite me in for a few moments?" asked Miss Harris, wistfully. "I heard what someone, your father probably, said about not wanting to see anyone just now. But I cannot well come again, and it is raining torrents outside."

"Yes, you may enter, and remain until the storm abates," said Lois, cheerfully. "My father would not let anyone leave his door in such a storm as this. Pray come in, madam."

"It is kind of you to say 'madam' to a creature like me," sighed the stranger, following the girl into the poorly furnished and scrupulously neat apartment.

Lois smiled.

"When I was very young, one of the first lessons my dear mother taught me was to be polite to everyone," she returned, quietly.

"You look like your mother, my dear," said Miss Harris, huskily. "I—I was afraid you would not."

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"Did you know my mother?" exclaimed Lois, clasping her hands together, and looking eagerly at the stranger in the coarse, ill-fitting gown.

"Yes, my dear; I knew her years ago, when we were both young girls. She looked then as you do now. I was distantly related to her, in fact. I—I was wealthy in those days, but I have since lost all my money, and am now reduced to penury—ay, to want," murmured the shabbily-dressed woman.

Lois sprang forward excitedly.

"Surely you cannot be the great Miss Harris, of California, of whom I have heard her speak thousands of times!"

"Yes, I am Miss Harris, my dear; great once, in the eyes of the world, when I had money, but despised now that I am reduced and in want."

In moment Lois' arms were around her, and tears were falling from the girl's beautiful dark eyes.

"Oh, do not say that, dear Miss Harris!" she cried. "I love you because my mother loved you in the days that are past. Money does not always bring love, and the loss of it cannot lessen the love of those who owe us allegiance, and who have a true affection for us. Welcome, a thousand times welcome to our home, dear aunt; if you will let me call you that; and—and I shall use my influence to have father invite you to share our humble home for ever, if you only will."

"No, no, Lois," replied Miss Harris, "you have mouths enough to earn bread for."

"One more would not signify," declared Lois, "and your presence beneath this roof would amply compensate me. I would take a world of pleasure in working a little harder than I do now to keep you here."

"Before you give me too much hope on that point you had better talk it over with your father. He may think differently from what you do. He may not want to keep a tramp's boarding-house," she added, quietly.

"Father will be sure to think as I do," reiterated Lois. "He has a rough exterior, but the kindest of hearts beats in his rugged bosom."

"You are right there, Lois," said John Davis, pushing open an inner door and coming forward. "I could not help overhearing all that passed between you two. I am sorry you have lost all your money, Miss Harris, but that will not make any difference in the heartiness of the welcome we give you; and if Lois wants you to stay here with us, stay you shall. So take off your bonnet, and make yourself at home."

(To be continued.)

FACETTE.

WAITER: "'Ere's the bill-of-fare, sir." Farmer Hayrick: "Well, no, thank ye. I don't care to read it till after I've 'ad something to eat."

HE: "Do you believe that germs can be transmitted by kissing?" She: "I don't know, but I'm very fond of scientific experiments."

JONES: "I married my wife a month after she accepted me." BROWN: "And I married mine three days after she refused me."

MR. HUNKER: "I have merely a speaking acquaintance with Miss Throckmorton." MR. SPATTZ: "You are very lucky; all her other acquaintances are listening acquaintances."

"Of course," observed the thin cyclist, "water won't run uphill." "Well," replied the fat cyclist, who was still puffing and blowing, "I don't blame it."

SARAH (yawning): "W-what's tramps?" ALICE (indignantly): "What stupidity! Why, tramps was the card I turned up at the end of the deal—whatever that was."

"It's the man who persists as'll rise in the world," remarked Mr. Rafferty, sententiously. "True fer yes," replied Mr. Dolou. "An' fur proof Ol' kin point to the tombstone iv a frien' that persisted in thawin' dynamite by a shtove."

AN Irishman (twin brother to the one who swore "By the powers, he'd never go into the water till he could swim") once putting on a new pair of boots remarked, "Sure and sartin, I'll never be able to get on those infarnal boots till I've worn 'em at least a wake."

A SCEPTICAL hearer recently said to a minister, "How do you reconcile the teachings of the Bible with the latest conclusions of science?" "I haven't seen this morning's papers," naively replied the minister. "What are the latest conclusions of modern science?"

DRIBBLER: "In my opinion, a man who writes an illegible hand does it because he thinks people are willing to puzzle over it. In other words, he is a mass of conceit." Scribbler: "Not always. Sometimes a man writes illegibly, not because he is conceited, but because he is modest." Dribbler: "Modest! What about?" Scribbler: "About his spelling."

BROWN: "Heavens! We are in for it now. Here comes Trotter, just back from a six months' trip abroad; he'll bore us to death with his talk about it." (Groans from the rest.) Trotter: "Well, boys, how are you all? I have just returned from a six months' tour on the Continent." (More groans.) I am just going to sit down here for two or three hours (more groans), and I want (groans) you to tell me all that has happened here while I was away." (But they didn't—the shock was too great.)

MR. LYNCH and his friend were discussing family names and their history. "How did your name originate?" asked the friend. "Oh, probably one of my ancestors was of the grasping kind that you hear about so often. Somebody gave him an 'ynch,' and he took an 'L.'"

SOMEONE took Charlie up and asked him if he was papa's boy. He answered, "Yes." "And you're mamma's boy, too?" "Yes," replied Charlie. "Well, how can you be papa's boy and mamma's both at the same time?" "Oh," replied Charlie, quite indifferently, "can't a waggon have two horses?"

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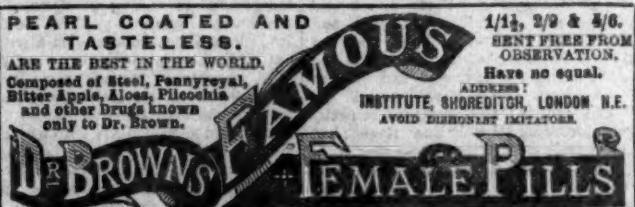
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SOCIETY.

The Queen will return to Windsor Castle from Balmoral on the morning of Tuesday, the 21st, and Her Majesty is to arrive at Osborne for her usual summer residence in the Isle of Wight about Friday, July 16th.

The Tsar and Tsaritsa will probably visit both Denmark and Scotland during the autumn, and will be accompanied on their journey by their daughters. These Majesties will go from St. Petersburg to Copenhagen on board their yacht.

The Empress Eugénie will start early in July (after having paid a visit to the Queen at Windsor-Castle) on a cruise along the west coast of Scotland in her steam yacht *Thistle*, which is now at Cowes, and she may possibly go to Norway.

The Queen will be pleased to open the new road which is being constructed between Victoria-grove and Whippingham-road. The ceremony will take place during the summer residence of the Court at Osborne, probably about July 19th, and Princess Beatrice will be present with the Queen.

The Duke of Teck is expected shortly at Stuttgart on a visit to the King of Württemberg, who has placed a country house, in the neighbourhood of the Württemberg capital, at his disposal. Had the Duke's mother been of equal birth with his father, he would have been the next heir to the throne of Württemberg.

It is understood that although Prince Arthur of Connaught and the young Duke of Albany are at Eton, Prince Alexander of Battenberg will not go to the famous college, but, upon the completion of his private tuition, will go straight on board the *Britannia*, and commence his training for a naval career, just as did his cousin, the Duke of York.

The Duke of York is in command of her Majesty's ship *Crescent* at Portsmouth. The ship is commissioned for three months' service, and will take part in the manoeuvres, after which there is every probability that his Royal Highness will take the vessel for a short cruise, possibly to the Mediterranean.

The health of the little Duke of Albany is not all that could be wished. He seems to have inherited too large a share of his father's delicacy, and it is often pitiful to see the weariness of his pale little face. Eton is far too rough a school for him, and the ruddy complexion of his sturdy cousin, Prince Arthur of Connaught, makes a very striking contrast.

HOLLAND will certainly be favoured as a holiday resort this year. The coronation of the young Queen Wilhelmina does not take place till September. It is true, but the Dutch are already beginning to assume a festive air, and it is certain by the time the holiday season sets in all Holland will be already *en fête*. The coronation itself will be less picturesque than such a ceremony usually is in countries where there is an episcopate; but then the country and the people and the customs are all picturesque, and it is sure to be quaint and interesting to see mynebe's rejoicings on a grand scale.

THE German Emperor and Empress are expected at Hanover on the 2nd of September, when their Majesties will reside at the Royal Schloss and the Emperor will hold a grand review of the garrison. The Emperor and Empress will spend about a week in the neighbourhood in order to be present at the army manoeuvres in the Hanover and Minden districts. A great many Royal guests are expected this year at the German Imperial manoeuvres, including the Prince Regent of Brunswick, the King of Württemberg, the King of Saxony, the Reigning Prince of Schaumburg-Lippe, the Reigning Prince of Waldeck and Pyrmont, and the Duke of Anhalt.

STATISTICS.

CHICAGO is said to have 207 millionaires. Out of every million persons 1,200 die from gonorrhoea.

There are 109 women to every 100 men in the world.

It is estimated that the amount of water precipitated on the globe annually in the form of rain, snow, &c., is 29,000 cubic miles.

In 15 years Russia has sent 624,000 persons to Siberia, fully 100,000 relatives of prisoners having accompanied the exiles of their own free will.

GEMS.

There is no sweeter repose than that which is bought with labour.

He is happy whose circumstances suit his temper; but he is more excellent who can suit his temper to any circumstance.

Thought and sympathy are often more valuable than anything money can procure. Both need continual circulation to keep them wholesome and strong.

We should manage our fortune as we do our health—enjoy it when good, be patient when it is bad, and never apply violent remedies except in an extreme necessity.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

OATMEAL CAKES.—One cup of oatmeal, wet with one cup of sweet milk; soak overnight; in the morning add a little salt, one teaspoonful of baking powder, one egg, and enough sweet milk and a little cream to make soft gums; bake in gem pans in a quick oven.

NEW CROQUETTES.—Season cold mashed potatoes with pepper, salt and nutmeg, add a tablespoonful of butter to each cup of potato, beat to a cream, and then add two or three well-beaten eggs and some chopped parsley and celery; roll into oval balls, dip in beaten egg, then in meal or crumble, and fry in hot lard.

GERMAN POTATO SALAD.—Boil six good-sized potatoes; peel and slice while hot and pour over the following: Cut half a pound of lean bacon in small dice and fry brown. Season potatoes with salt, pepper, and finely sliced onion.

Mix thoroughly with the bacon and then add half a cup of white vinegar. Garnish with sliced hard-boiled eggs.

JELLY CAKE.—Two eggs, one cup of sugar, two tablespoonfuls of butter, one-half cup of sweet milk, one-half teaspoonful of soda, one teaspoonful of cream of tartar, and one and one-half cups of flour; beat the eggs and sugar to a cream, and then add the butter and milk; put the cream of tartar and soda in the flour, and sift it in the cake last. Bake in layers in a quick oven, and spread with jelly.

DELICIOUS APPLE DUMPLINGS.—Make a paste with a piece of butter about as large as an egg, melted in one teaspoonful of boiled mashed potato, to which is added half a cupful of boiled milk. Salt to taste and pour the mixed milk, potato and butter into flour enough to make a rather soft dough. Sprinkle over the dough one heaping teaspoonful of baking powder and work it into the mass as rapidly as possible. Cut the dough into pieces about the size of an after-dinner coffee cup and roll each piece out separately. Fill each with quartered apples or with apple sauce seasoned to taste. Make the edges and corners fast, first wetting them so that they will adhere. Prick them several times with a fork, so that the air may escape; put them in a pan with paper lining and bake in a hot oven until brown. Serve with hard sauce or lemon sauce. Many persons eat dumplings with sugar and cream.

MISCELLANEOUS.

The eggs of the silkworm are about the size of mustard-seeds.

The latest method of purifying water is by means of electricity.

Keys of iron and bronze have been found in Greece and Italy dating from at least the seventh century B.C.

FIRE PROOF paper bricks are coming into use for building purposes. They are made with a hollow centre, to insure uniformity in hardness, and the hollow is afterwards filled with cement.

DENMARK is properly Denmark, the territory comprised within the "mark," or boundary established by Dan, a Scandinavian chieftain.

On the inside cover of a newly-designed watch a thin pocket is provided, having an open centre and a slot in one side for the insertion of a photograph.

The only soap which the Hindus of the orthodox type employ is made entirely of vegetable products. But soap is little used in India, being almost an unknown luxury with the natives.

The "life tree" of Jamaica is harder to kill than any other species of woody growth known to arboriculturists. It continues to grow and thrive for months after it has been uprooted and exposed to the sun.

On a parade-ground at Calcutta are several adjutant birds. These creatures walk up and down the grounds, and they look so much like soldiers that at a distance strangers often mistake them for such.

FINISHES can be discharged more accurately by a new arm-rest, which has straps passing over the shoulders and around the body to carry a horizontal support, on which the right arm rests when sighting and firing the gun.

The largest sun-dial in the world is on Hayos Horos, a large promontory, extending 3,000 ft. above the Aegean Sea. As the sun swings round the shadow of this mountain it touches, one by one, a circle of islands, which act as hour-marks.

The Russian State sceptre is of solid gold, three feet long, and contains, among its ornaments, two hundred and sixty-eight diamonds, three hundred and sixty rubies, and fifteen emeralds.

There could not possibly be a whiter city than Cadiz, unless it were built of snow. As you near the coast you see in front of you a white mass, which appears to be floating upon the water, and looks exactly like an iceberg.

AN amphitheatre, several large Roman villas, and a great many coins, pottery, bronze, silver and iron vessels and implements have been found at Windesch, in the Swiss Canton of Aargau, which is regarded as the most important archaeological discovery in recent years.

TULIPS are cultivated in Constantinople, and there is a tulip festival there once a year in spring. Every palace, room, gallery, and garden is decorated with tulips of every kind, and at night they are all lighted by coloured lamps and Bengal fires.

The most wonderful bridge in the world is one of solid agate in Arizona. It is a polished tree, from 3 ft. to 4 ft. in diameter, spanning a chasm 40 ft. wide. More than 100 ft. of its length is in sight, both ends being embedded in the sandstone of the canon.

In one of the States of America farmers derive a profitable income from a lake each winter by harvesting hay on the ice. The shallowness of the water in the lake bed causes the grass growing on the bottom to project considerably above the surface, and when the ice forms the hay can be cut with great ease.

A CHINESE thoroughfare is the exact reverse of ours in shape, the middle part being considerably higher than the two pavements on each side. In the rainy season, if a vehicle should slip, the occupant runs considerable risk of being smothered in the mud and water which always accumulates at that period.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

B. S.—The year 1898 will be leap-year.

S. P.—They should be published in both.

NEBO.—The later will cancel the previous one.

ONE IN TROUBLE.—Consult a skilful sural surgeon.

GRANT.—Anyone may be called to serve on a coroner's jury.

FaITHFUL READER.—The appointments rest with the directors.

NATURE.—The British navy is by far the largest in the world.

W. W.—You "protect" an invention, and "register" a trade-mark.

In Doubt.—It is a legal claim, and you had better pay it at once.

FORTRAN.—Nothing better or cheaper than you can buy at the shop.

BOXMAN.—Write to the secretary for a prospectus and other information.

M. H.—Keep it from the ab., and in a place neither too hot nor too dry.

BIO-JOURNAL.—We do not give addresses through the columns of the paper.

SHELTON.—Consult a solicitor, and place the partnership deed before him.

JACK TAR.—The oldest iron vessel in the world is the Michigan, built in 1844.

MAB.—Spirits of turpentine is the best agent for cleaning white kid gloves.

D. B.—Not aware of any prizes being offered for articles sent to the Crystal Palace.

WEARY WOMAN.—Legally the marriage is binding, and that is all you need trouble about.

GARL.—The appointment of clerks in the large steamship companies rest with the managers.

ENQUIRER.—One may do the call for both; sister could apologize for brother and leave card.

FRECKLES.—It is said that sour milk applied to the face night and morning will remove freckles.

DOLLIE DENE.—Kerosene oil will make a tin kettle as bright as new. Rub with a soft woolen cloth.

INTERIM BENEFACTION.—The cost of a marriage license varies in different districts from £1 1s. to £3 12s. 6d.

STRAD.—It is said that some of the finest violins are not varnished, the wood is oiled and polished by hand.

KNIT.—We have replied in full to this query so often that we really cannot afford space to do so again.

HILDE.—We think your friends are wise and kind to endeavor to laugh you out of such an unsuitable engagement.

A NOISOM.—Squeaky boots may be cured by the injection of powdered French chalk through a perforation in the inner sole.

AMBITION.—Improve yourself by studying in the evening. Self-taught men are the best of educated men for business purposes.

OUR READER.—It is almost impossible to entirely eradicate a stain upon that sort of material; but you might try salts of lemon.

NOTICE.—Probably the vessels used were not properly clean or the milk was slightly sour; either would cause the failure just as you describe.

DISAPPOINTED.—If he never made you any promises you have no remedy at law. Avoid his society, and look out for another and better lover.

G. H. E.—Any woman may act as bridesmaid; the position is purely ornamental; the marriage could, and often does, proceed without any maid at all.

CURL.—It is not "unlawful" in an international sense, to bombard an unfortified seaport, but in most cases it would be quite unnecessary to do so.

USO-DOS.—The phonendoscope conveys to the physician the sounds made by any internal organ, and enables him to decide whether it is healthy or not.

UNHAPPY GRAM.—If you marry again with the knowledge that your husband is alive, and without having obtained a divorce, you will be guilty of bigamy.

ELLIE AND JON.—The most private way of being married is before a superintendent-registrar. Two witnesses are required, and the fees are under ten shillings.

WORLD-BY-EMIGRANT.—You can get all information desired from Government Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broadway, London, S.W., upto application in writing.

AMATEUR.—When photographic plates are once used and spoiled they are of no further value to the amateur. Only an expert can repair them so that they will be usable again.

ROSEMARY R.—The engraving should be done by the master who supplies the medals or badges; when these are of gold the metal put out by the graver usually pays for the work.

GRATEFUL READER.—She can be compelled to contribute towards their maintenance if they fall on the rates.

GADE.—It would depend upon what the agreement was between yourself and your employer. Such matters should be settled beforehand.

IGCILE.—Many persons consider the flavouring of ices is greatly improved by boiling the thinly pared rinds of two lemons when making the custard, but that is a matter of taste.

HUGO.—Six months is the longest sentence which can be imposed by magistrates, but two sentences of that length can be given on separate counts, making twelve months in all.

HARD.—In law the nationality of a child follows that of its father; if, as you say, he was Scotch, then the child also is Scotch, even though its mother was an Irishwoman and the birth took place in Ireland.

LETTER.—There is an internal connection between the ear and the nose, which when stopped up, as it sometimes is in colds, occasions a disagreeable and sometimes painful sensation in the ear.

NEWTON.—We should not consider it either wise or safe to go to sleep with a paraffin stove lit in our bedroom; the mechanism of these stoves is seldom first-class, and the combustion of the oil is therefore imperfect.

INTRIGUER.—In the order of superiority the navies of the world rank thus: 1, Great Britain; 2, France; 3, Russia; 4, Italy; 5, United States; 6, Germany; 7, Spain; 8, Japan; 9, Austria; 10, Netherlands.

DOUNTRUL.—There is no more sin in dancing than in singing, or bicycling or footballing, or being present at entertainments, or, in short, in any form of recreation, unless it is carried so far as to exceed that it weakens the inclination to exercises of higher import.

DESTINY.

We all must come to the same low gate,
At its lonely portals must each one wait;
Be we rich or poor, or high or low,
Whether gladly or sadly, swift or slow,
Alone must we each down the pathway go
And pause at the same low gate.

YES, all to the same low gate must come
When the heart grows cold and the lips grow dumb.
Some with terror and some with tears,
Some triumphantly, some with fears,
In youth, or bowed with the weight of years,
To the same low gate all come.

Soon, soon must we reach this gate so low,
What lieth beyond? ah, could we know!
We can only question with vague surmises;
None ever return to tell what lies
On the other side, but we close our eyes
And rest at the gate so low.

MARCUS.—Both Romanists and Protestants have been martyrs for their faith. There were no Protestants in "olden times"—now before reign of Henry VIII.; he made that sect.

LEONARDO.—Authorities disagree on this subject. The most rational explanation is that it comes from the Hebrew word *sodal*, silence, repose. It is thought to mean a pause, or to call special attention, or to have the same meaning as the word amen.

FRUIT.—The rule is that the servants of nobility and gentry (titl'd people), officers of army any navy, judges, and medical professors may wear cockades; as a matter of fact anyone may sport them without let or hindrance.

CURIOS.—The wearing of hats in Parliament by the members may be traced back to the time when those who were summoned to legislate—or, rather, to authorise the king to make levies—came in wearing helmets, which were not easily removed.

MAGG.—Josephine was the widow of a French Viscount when she married Napoleon I.; she had by her first husband a daughter, who became Queen of Holland and mother to the man who was afterwards Emperor of the French or Napoleon III.; Josephine had no children to Napoleon I.

METHAMORPHIC CYCLE.—There are a number of new inventions in the bicycle line; an interesting one is that which attaches a baby carriage to the wheel. It really makes the wheel into a tricycle, but it is slow and perhaps very easily, and unquestionably will find its use.

G. E. H.—If the large plate glass window has been broken by pure accident, not through any fault on the part of the individual who breaks it, then the owner must repair the damage at his own cost; it is a risk against which he should have protected himself by insurance.

GOOF HOMESWIFE.—Have the floor thoroughly scrubbed and dried before going over with the paint and varnish. To secure the best results, the stain should be put on first and allowed to dry before the coating of varnish is added. A mixture of warm water, soap and household ammonia is the best fluid one can use for cleaning board floors. Never use a scrubbing brush on painted, stained, or varnished floor. Use a soft mop.

HOUSEHOLDER.—A constant and liberal sprinkling of powdered borax over the places where they frequent, some of the powder being forced into all holes, crevices, &c., where they are supposed to retire in the daytime, has been known, after persevering application, to entirely eradicate them. But you must be both liberal and persevering, or there is no use trying the remedy.

NOT SCIENTIFIC.—A man weighs less when the barometer is high, notwithstanding the fact that the atmospheric pressure on him is more than when the barometer is low. As the pressure of air on an ordinary-sized man is about fifteen tons, the rise of the mercury from twenty-nine inches to thirty-one inches adds about one ton to the load he has to carry.

SOW OF IRISH.—Various opinions exist why the shamrock is the emblem of Ireland. Some assert that it is the best and richest food for cattle, and that no country could produce it but theirs. Others suppose that when St. Patrick, their patron saint, endeavoured to explain the mystery of the Trinity, being unable to contend against the superstition of the age, he had recourse to a visible image; he therefore made the shamrock the emblem of the divisibility of the Divinity into three distinct parts united in one stem.

NEWSPIRKS READER.—The first news-sheets at all answering to our modern newspaper were issued by order of the Venetian government, about 1550. At first they were simply written out, and exhibited to public inspection on payment of a small coin called a "gazette," whence the modern term "Gazette." Afterwards, the demand made it necessary to print them. The first English newspaper of which we positive evidence is the *Weekly News*, published by Nathaniel Butler, in 1622.

ANNETTE.—Wash in bran water, unless very dirty, when a little melted soap may be added. Boil half a pound of bran in two quarts of water for half an hour, strain and add to it a gallon of soft water. Squeeze the article to till clean. Do not rub, as that causes the colour to run. If no soap has been used it will not need rinsing, and will be slightly stiff, as when new. A tablespoonful of vinegar to each quart of water will brighten pinks and greens, and a very little soda will do the same for purples and blues. They should be rinsed when half dry, with not too hot an iron. To retain the colour of tinted lawn or holland, rinse in a strong tea made of common hay.

E. S.—The sect known as Shakers originated in England about the year 1747. In 1747 they went to the United States under the guidance and leadership of a woman called Mother Ann Lee. They take their name from the peculiar movements they make when dancing, which is a part of their religious ceremony. They do not believe in marriage. The name shaking Quakers is sometimes applied to them, but they differ from regular Quakers on almost all points of doctrine, practice and customs. There are but comparatively few settlements remaining, and those are in the United States. These people call themselves "The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearance."

HONOR.—To prepare creamed eggs, boil hard for twenty minutes as many eggs as you wish; remove the shells (they come off easily if steeped in cold water), cut them in two and place them, points upwards in a dish and cover them with bechamel sauce. To make this sauce for ten or twelve eggs, take a piece of butter, the size of a large egg, place it in a small saucepan, with a tablespoonful and a half of flour, salt and pepper to suit taste; mix well at the edge of the fire; add two tumblersful of milk, stirring continually for ten minutes. The milk must be added by degrees, a little at a time, as the sauce boils and thickens. It should be of the consistency of cream.

ESPRESSO.—To make good coffee there are almost as many recipes as there are persons using the beverage. Each has a way of preparing it, acquired more or less from experience, which is believed to be the best and only way to make coffee. It should be freshly roasted and ground for use. When coffee has been roasted some days before use it should be heated through in the oven previous to use. Try this way. Pour boiling water on the coffee in the pot and place on the stove. Just as soon as it comes to the boil, or as soon as four or five bubbles rise, take it off the fire and pour out a teaspoonful and return it. Set the pot on the stove for a minute or so and pour gently over the top one teaspoonful of cold water. Let all stand a minute longer and it will pour off bright and clear. The cold water by reason of its greater density sinks and carries the grounds with it to the bottom of the pot.

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NOTICE.—LETTERS TO THE EDITOR, to be addressed to THE LONDON READER, 26, Catherine Street, Strand, S.C.

We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

HOUSEHOLD HINTS.

QUESTION.—I am the landlady of a large Boarding-house, and am anxious to possess a reliable disinfectant in case of disease breaking out. What do you recommend?

ANSWER.—By taking ordinary precautions and using **LIFEBOUY SOAP** ad. lib., you will not only check the spread of disease, but will reduce to a minimum the risks of it ever entering your house. I was once successful in confining an attack of Scarlet Fever to one person through the timely use of **LIFEBOUY SOAP**, although there were more than twenty persons in the house at the time. This was my first trial of the famous soap, and as I have used it ever since, I need scarcely say that my house has been free from the very suspicion of infectious disease. To avert sickness and maintain the body in health, **LIFEBOUY SOAP** is immeasurably superior to any disinfectant I know, its softness and purity being beyond praise.

QUESTION.—I am a nurse in one of the poorest and most dirty districts of a large manufacturing town, and cannot help feeling rather nervous, sometimes, at the thought of the risk I run of infection from the impure air, etc. What can I do to protect myself against it?

ANSWER.—I do not wonder at your feeling nervous under the circumstances. Your apprehensions are very natural. Your best and most simple safeguard is to use the excellent Disinfectant Soap known as the "**LIFEBOUY**" when taking your bath, rubbing the whole of your body well with it, face included. This will not only protect you from infectious germs, but will at the same time invigorate you. You need not fear its being too strong for the skin, as it is an absolutely pure soap, and free from alkali. I always use it myself. Also have your undergarments washed with it, which will be an additional preventive, and use it in the place of any other whilst occupied in your nursing duties.

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